

CEMETERY DANCE



WINTER 1991 / Volume Three, Issue One

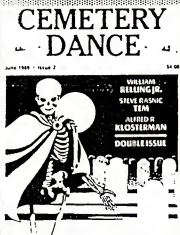
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CEMETERY DANCE MAGAZINE

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WORDS FROM THE EDITOR

RICHARD T. CHIZMAR

CEMETERY DANCE #7 -- Welcome back to another issue of *Cemetery Dance*, the magazine of dark mystery & horror fiction, non-fiction features, columns, news and reviews. If you have picked us up from a bookstore and are reading us for the first time... enjoy this Joe R. Lansdale Special Issue. We hope you are impressed enough to subscribe or keep an eye out for the Spring Edition, arriving at bookstores on April 25.

*

Thank you to all the wonderful people who phoned/wrote to congratulate us for the recent World Fantasy Award and American Horror Award nominations. We are quite proud of these achievements (especially after publishing only six issues). Look for *Cemetery Dance* representatives at 1991's World Horror Convention (Nashville, February) and World Fantasy Convention (Tucson, October). Hope to see you there!

*

We have some excellent features in store for you this time around -- highlighted by a lengthy feature section. Enjoy Gary Raisor's interview with feature author, Joe R. Lansdale, Ed Gorman's touching tribute, and two pieces of Lansdale fiction -- the original play version of "Drive-in Date" and an obscure reprint entitled "Bestsellers Guaranteed." And, to top it off, read a rave review of Lansdale's *Night Visions* contributions from Ed Bryant.

The fiction line-up is headed by *CD* regular Ronald Kelly's chilling novelette, "The Winds Within," a Joseph Citro novel excerpt from the forthcoming Warner release, *Dark Twilight*, and a selection of other dark mystery short stories by Andrew Vachss, Graham Masterton, Ed Gorman, Bentley Little, Gary Raisor, Bill Pronzini, Gary Brander, and a special *Hotter Blood* feature.

The non-fiction columns have never looked better. Matthew Costello debuts this issue with his commentary column, "Nightmare Alley." T. Liam McDonald contin-

ues his stunning interview series with the first of two lengthy conversations with Peter Straub, while Joseph Citro talks with real-life monster hunter, Joseph W. Zarzynski. Ed Bryant and Lori Perkins both return this issue with more insightful book reviews and Paul Sammon comes back with the second installment of his film column, "Rough Cuts." Finally, a tip of the hat to *CD*'s regular cover artist, Charles Lang, for his latest chilling masterpiece, "The Dead's Big Comeback."

*

Next issue should be a winner, with original short fiction from the likes of John Shirley, Nancy Collins, Gary Brander, Tom Elliott, Gene Michael Higney, and many others. Plus the conclusion of our Peter Straub interview, an exclusive novel excerpt (from a surprise author), and much, much more. Look for it!

*

A FINAL REMINDER: *COLD BLOOD: New Tales of Mystery & Horror* will be officially released within weeks! I edited this hardcover anthology for Ziesing Books and think it is a wonderful cross-genre showcase -- the best of horror, suspense, mystery and crime from the field's best authors. The book will be published as both a Trade and Limited hardcover. Please turn to the back cover of this issue for ordering and price information.

*

Enough for this time. Please remember... Ingram Periodicals is *Cemetery Dance*'s national bookstore distributor. If you frequent a chain or independent book store, please ask the manager to order *Cemetery Dance* for your area. Now turn up the lights, flip the page, and start the dance...

ED GORMAN is the author of the acclaimed Jack Dwyer mystery series, which includes the classics, *The Autumn Dead* and *Cry of Shadows*. He writes horror under Daniel Ransom, edits *Mystery Scene* magazine, and is the co-editor of the recent anthology *Stalkers*. He also writes a regular column for *Cemetery Dance* entitled "Gormanian." The following tale is like all of Gorman's fiction: powerful and sad, thought-provoking and touching.

In the darkness, the girl said, "Are you all right?" "Huh?"

"I woke you up because you sounded so bad. You must have been having a nightmare."

"Oh. Yeah. Right." I tried to laugh but the sound just came out strangled and harsh.

Cold midnight. Deep midwest. A Greyhound bus filled with old folks and runaway kids and derelicts of every kind. Anybody can afford a Greyhound ticket these days. I was probably the only guy on the bus who had a real purpose in life. And if I needed a reminder of that purpose, all I had to do was shove my hand into the pocket of my p-coat and touch the chill blue metal of the .38. I had a purpose all right.

The girl had gotten on a day before, during a dinner stop. She wasn't what you'd call pretty but then neither was I. We talked of course, the way you do when you travel; dull grinding social chatter at first, but eventually you get more honest. She told me she'd just been dumped by a guy named Mel, a used car salesman at Schwab Motors in a little town named Burnside. She was headed to Chicago where she'd find a job and show Mel that she was capable of going on without him. Come to think of it, I guess Polly here had a goal, too, and in a certain way our goals were similar. We both wanted to pay people back for hurting us.

Sometime around ten, when the driver turned off the tiny overhead lights and people started falling asleep, I heard her start crying. It wasn't loud and it wasn't hard but it was genuine. There was a lot of pain there.

I don't know why -- I'm not the type of guy to get involved -- but I put my hand on her lap. She took it in both of her hands and held it tightly. "Thanks," she said and leaned over and kissed me with wet cheeks and a trembling hot little mouth.

"You're welcome," I said, and that's when I drifted off to sleep, the wheels of the Greyhound thrumming

down the highway, the dark coffin inside filled with people snoring, coughing and whispering.

According to the luminous hands on my wrist-watch, it was forty-five minutes later when Polly woke me up to tell me I'd been having a nightmare.

The lights were still off overhead. The only illumination was the soft silver of moonlight through the tinted window. We were in the back seat on the left hand of the aisle. The only thing behind us was the john, which almost nobody seemed to use. The seats across from us were empty.

After telling me about how sorry she felt for me having nightmares like that, she leaned over and whispered, "Who's Kenny?"

"Kenny?"

"That's the name you kept saying in your nightmare."

"Oh."

"You're not going to tell me, huh?"

"Doesn't matter. Really."

I leaned back and closed my eyes. There was just darkness and the turning of the wheels and the winter air whistling through the windows. You could smell the faint exhaust.

"You know what I keep thinking?" she said.

"No. What?" I didn't open my eyes.

"I keep thinking we're the only two people in the world, you and I, and we're on this fabulous boat and we're journeying to someplace beautiful."

I had to laugh at that. She sounded so naive yet desperate too. "Someplace beautiful, huh?"

"Just the two of us."

And she gave my hand a little squeeze. "I'm sorry I'm so corny," she said.

And that's when it happened. I started to turn around in my seat and felt something fall out of my pocket and hit the floor, going *thunk*. I didn't have to wonder what it was.

Before I could reach it, she bent over, her long blonde hair silver in the moonlight, and got it for me.

She looked at it in her hand and said, "Why would you carry a gun?"

"Long story."

She looked as if she wanted to take the gun and throw it out the window. She shook her head. "You're going to do something with this, aren't you?"

I sighed and reached over and took the gun from her. "I'd like to try and catch a little nap if you don't

mind."

"But--"

And I promptly turned over so that three-fourths of my body was pressed against the chill wall of the bus. I pretended to go to sleep, resting there and smelling diesel fuel and feeling the vibration of the motor.

The bus roared on into the night. It wouldn't be long before I'd be seeing Dawn and Kenny again. I touched the .38 in my pocket. No; not long at all.

..

If you've taken many Greyhounds, then you know about layovers. You spend an hour and a half gulping down greasy food and going to the bathroom in a john that reeks like a city dump on a hot day and staring at people in the waiting area who seem to be deformed in some way. Or that's how they look at 2:26 A.M., anyway.

This layover was going to be different. At least for me. I had plans.

As the bus pulled into a small brick depot that looked as if it had been built back during the Depression, Polly said, "You're going to do it here, aren't you?"

"Do what?"

"Shoot somebody."

"Why would you say that?"

"I've just got a feeling is all. My Mom always says I have ESP."

She started to say something else but then the driver lifted the microphone and gave us his spiel about how the layover would be a full hour and how there was good food to be had in the restaurant and how he'd enjoyed serving us. There'd be a new driver for the next six hours of our journey, he said.

There weren't many lights on in the depot. Passengers stood outside for awhile stretching and letting the cold air wake them up.

I followed Polly off the bus and immediately started walking away. An hour wasn't a long time.

Before I got two steps, she snagged my arm. "I was hoping we could be friends. You know, I sense you've been hurt just as much as I've been." In the shadowy light of the depot, she looked younger than ever. Young and well-scrubbed and sad. "I don't want you to get into trouble. Whatever it is, you've got your whole life ahead of you. It won't be worth it. Honest."

"Take care of yourself," I said, and leaned over and kissed her.

She grabbed me again and pulled me close and said, "I got in a little trouble once myself. It's no fun. Believe me."

I touched her cheek gently and then I set off walking quickly into the darkness.

Armstrong was a pretty typical midwestern town, four blocks of retail area, a fading brick grade school and

junior high, a small public library with a white stone edifice, a court house, a Chevrolet dealership and many blocks of small white frame houses that all looked pretty much the same in the early morning gloom. You could see frost rimed on the windows and lonely gray smoke twisting up from the chimneys. As I walked, my heels crunched ice. Faint streetlight threw everything into deep shadow. My breath was silver.

A dog joined me for a few blocks and then fell away. Then I spotted a police cruiser moving slowly down the block. I jumped behind a huge oak tree, flattening myself against the rough bark so the cops couldn't see me. They drove right on past, not even glancing in my direction.

The address I wanted was a ranch house that sprawled over the west end of a cul-de-sac. A sweet little red BMW was parked in front of the two-stall garage and a huge satellite dish antenna was discreetly hidden behind some fir trees. No lights shone anywhere.

I went around back and worked on the door there. It didn't take me long to figure out that Kenny had gotten himself one of those infra-red security devices. I tugged on my gloves, cut a fist-size hole in the back door window, reached in and unlocked the dead bolt, and then pushed the door open. I could see one of the small round infra-red sensors pointing down from the ceiling. Most fool burglars wouldn't even think to look for it and they'd pass right through the beam and the alarm would go off instantly.

I got down on my haunches and half-crawled until I was well past the eye of the infra-red. No alarm had sounded. I went up the steps and into the house.

I was probably the only guy on the bus who had a real purpose. And if I needed a reminder of that purpose, all I had to do was shove my hand into the pocket of my p-coat and touch the chill blue metal of the .38. I had a purpose all right.

The dark kitchen smelled of spices, paprika and cinnamon and thyme. Dawn had always been a good and careful cook.

The rest of the house was about what I'd expect. Nice but not expensive furnishings, lots of records and videotapes, and even a small bumper pool table in a spare room that doubled as a den. Nice, sure, but nothing that would attract attention. Nothing that would appear to have been financed by six hundred thousand dollars in bank robbery money.



And then the lights came on.

At first I didn't recognize the woman. She stood at the head of a dark narrow hallway wearing a sheer, thin gown that showed me not only her breasts but her thatch of ginger colored pubic hair. This was as close to sleeping in the nude as you could get and still have clothes on.

The flowing dark hair is what misled me. Dawn had always been a blonde. But dye and a gain of maybe fifteen pounds had changed her appearance considerably. And so had time. It hadn't been a friend to her.

She said, "I knew you'd show up some day, Chet."

"Where's Kenny?"

"You want some coffee?"

"You didn't answer my question."

She smiled her slow, sly smile. "You didn't answer mine, either."

She led us into the kitchen where a pot of black stuff stayed warm in a Mr. Coffee. She poured two cups and handed me one of them.

Much as I didn't want to, I let my eyes stray to her full, firm breasts. She laughed softly. "You were always a tit man."

"Yeah. I guess that's right."

"You came here to kill us, didn't you?"

"You were my wife. And we were supposed to split everything three ways. But Kenny got everything -- you and all the dough. And I did six years in the fucking slam."

"You could have turned us in."

I shook my head, "I have my own way of settling things."

She stared at me. "You look great, Chet. Prison must have agreed with you."

"I just kept thinking of this night. Waiting."

Her mouth tightened and for the first time her blue eyes showed traces of fear. Softly, she said, "Why don't we go in the living room and talk about it."

I glanced at my wristwatch. "I want to see Kenny."

"You will. Come on now."

So I followed her into the living room. I had a lot ahead of me. I wanted to kill them and then get back on the bus. While I'd be eating up the miles on a Greyhound, the local cops would be looking for a local killer. If only my gun hadn't dropped out and Polly seen it. But I'd have to worry about that later.

We sat on the couch. I started to say something but then she took my cup from me and set it on the glass table and came into my arms.

She opened her mouth and breathed fire into mine. Despite myself, I felt my cock harden and felt my body slide closer to hers.

But finally good sense overtook me. I held her away and said, "So while we're making out, Kenny walks in and shoots me. Is that it?"

"Don't worry about Kenny. Believe me."

And then we were kissing again. I was embracing ghosts, ancient words whispered in the back seats of cars

when we were in high school, tender promises made just before I left for Nam. Loving this woman had always been punishment because you could never believe her, never trust her, but I'd loved her anyway.

I'd just started to pull away when I heard the floor creak behind me and I saw Kenny. Even given how much I hated this man -- and how many long nights I'd laid on my prison bunk dreaming of vengeance -- I had to feel embarrassed. If Kenny had been his old self, I would have relished the moment. But Kenny was different now. He was in a wheelchair and his entire body was twisted and crippled up like a cerebral palsy victim. A small plaid blanket was thrown across his legs.

He surprised me by smiling. "Don't worry, Chet. I've seen Dawn entertain a lot of men out here in the living room before."

"Spare him the details," she said. "And spare me, too, while you're at it."

"Bitch," he whispered loud enough for us to hear.

He wheeled himself into the living room. The chair's electric motor whirred faintly as he angled over to the fireplace. On his way, he said, "You didn't wait long, Chet. You've only been out two weeks. You never did have much patience."

You could see the pain in his face when he moved.

I tried to say something but I just kept staring at this man who was now a cripple. I didn't know what to say.

"Nice set-up, huh?" Kenny said as he struck a stick match on the stone of the fireplace. With his hands twisted and gimped the way they were, it wasn't easy. He got his smoke going and said, "She tell you what happened to me?"

I looked at Dawn. She dropped her gaze. "No," I said.

He snorted. The sound was bitter. "She was doin' it to me just the way she did it to you. Right, bitch?"

She sighed then lighted her own cigarette. "About six months after we ran out on you with all the money, I grabbed the strongbox and took off."

Kenny smirked. "She met a sailor. A fucking sailor, if you can believe it."

"His name was Fred. Anyway, me and Fred had all the bank robbery cash -- there was still a couple hundred thousand left -- when Kenny here came after us in that red Corvette he always wanted. He got right up behind us but it was pouring rain and he skidded out of control and slammed into a tree."

He finished the story for me. "There was just one problem, right, bitch? You had the strongbox but you didn't know what was inside. Her and the sailor were going to have somebody use tools on the lock I'd put on it. They saw me pile up my 'vette but they kept on going. But later that night when they blew open the strongbox and found out that I'd stuffed it with old newspapers, the sailor beat her up and threw her out. So she came back

to me 'cause she just couldn't stand to be away from 'our' money. And this is where she's been all the time you were in the slam. Right here waitin' for poor pitiful me to finally tell her where I hid the loot. Or die. They don't give me much longer. That's what keeps her here."

"Pretty pathetic story, huh?" she said. She got up and went over to the small wet bar. She poured three drinks of pure Jim Beam and brought them over to us. She gunned hers in a single gulp and went right back for another.

"So she invites half the town in so she can fuck 'em on the couch there, just like she was tryin' to fuck you, Chet, and I just kind of vegetate in my wheelchair." Now it was his turn to down his whiskey. He hurled the glass into the fireplace. It smashed with the violence of a bullet slamming into a body. "Bitch!" he said. "Bitch!"

I tried to remember the easy friendship the three of us had enjoyed back when we were in high school, before Kenny and I'd been in Nam, and before the three of us had taken up bank robbery for a living. Hard to believe we'd ever liked each other at all.

Kenny's head dropped down then. At first I thought he might have passed out but then the choking sound of dry tears filled the room and I realized he was crying.

"You're such a pussy," she said. "Such a wimp."

And then it was her turn to smash her glass into the fireplace.

I knew I was blushing. I'd never heard two people go at each other this way. It was degrading.

He looked up at me. "You stick around here long enough, Chet, she'll make a deal with you. She'll give you half the money if you beat me up and make me tell you where it is."

I looked over at her. I knew what he said was true.

"She doesn't look as good as she used to -- she's kind of a used car now instead of a brand-new Caddy -- but she's still got some miles left on her. You should hear her and some of her boyfriends out here on the couch when they get goin'."

She started to say something but then she heard me start to laugh.

"What the hell's so funny?"

I stood up and looked at my watch. I had only ten minutes left to get back to the depot.

Kenny glanced up from his wheel chair. "Yeah, Chet, what's so funny?"

I looked at them both and just shook my head. "It'll come to you. One of these days. Believe me."

And with that, I left.

She made a play for my arm and Kenny sat there glowering at me but I just kept on walking. I had to hurry.

The cold, clean air not only revived me, it seemed to purify me in some way. I felt good again, whole and happy now that I was outdoors.

••

The bus was dark and warm. Polly had brought a bag of popcorn along. "You almost didn't make it," she said as the bus pulled away from the depot.

In five minutes we were rolling into countryside again. In farmhouses lights were coming on. In another hour, it would be dawn.

"You took it, didn't you?" I said.

"Huh?"

"You took it. My gun."

"Oh. Yes. I guess I did. I didn't want you to do anything foolish."

Back there at Kenny's I'd reached in my jacket pocket for the .38 and found it gone. "How'd you do it? You were pretty slick."

"Remember I told you I'd gotten into a little

trouble? Well, an uncle of mine taught me how to be a pickpocket and so for a few months I followed in his footsteps. Till Sheriff Baines arrested me one day."

"I'm glad you took it."

She looked over at me in the darkness of the bus and grinned. She looked like a kid. "You really didn't want to?"

"No," I said, staring out the window at the midwestern night. I thought of them back there in the house, in a prison cell they wouldn't escape till death. No, I hadn't wanted to shoot anybody at all.

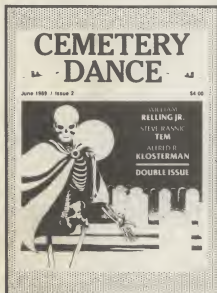
In the darkness, Dawn took my hand. It felt just as good as it had earlier this evening.

"We're really lucky we met each other, Chet."

"Yeah," I said, thinking of Dawn and Kenny again.

"You don't know how lucky we are."

-- CD



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GARY RAISOR is well-known for his wonderful short story, "Empty Places" (*Razored Saddles*) and other tales from *The Horror Show* and *Night Cry*. Look for big things from this friendly Kentuckian, including *Obsessions*, a Dark Harvest anthology due this month, and novel length work in the near future.

They drove in stony silence; man and woman, with unspoken recriminations as the third passenger in the station wagon. They were lovers with no love left. As the car made its way along the dusty back road, all that remained was the calm before the storm, quiet and uneasy.

"How on earth could you get lost looking for a gas station?" Elizabeth Cochran asked, unable to stand the silence any longer. "We should have stayed on the Interstate."

"Well," Tom replied, "if you want to get technical, we're not exactly lost. We're . . . uh . . . searching for a point of reference."

"Everything looks the same," she pointed out. "Nothing but trees and swamps. It's been over an hour since we've even seen a road sign."

Tom didn't answer. Instead, he reached over and flipped off the air conditioner. "Sorry, got to save the gas," he said under his breath, unable to look at Elizabeth.

Immediately the windshield began to fog from the humidity.

He struggled to crack the window and swore under his breath. The doctors had done a good job on his arm after the accident, but the damned thing just didn't work like a real arm. He kept at the window with dogged determination. With a final lurch it slid down, and the outside air felt like a wet blanket that had been slapped over his face, smothering him.

The south Florida evening had a hot green smell that made Tom's skin crawl. As he drove the dirt road that twisted through the endless mangrove swamps, he heard noises -- mainly the cries of small things being chased by big things.

From the sound, not all the small things were getting away.

A rustling, quickly muffled, drew his attention to the dense undergrowth, and it must have been the way the sun was shining through the foliage, because it looked like someone shadowy

. . . someone huge . . .

was moving around in there . . .

trying to stay hidden as they watched the car.

With a flash of exploding white, a form leaped into view. Wrenching the steering wheel to one side, Tom veered across the road. He realized it was a deer just before the station wagon slammed into a rut.

His laughter was uneasy as he wrestled the car back into the center of the road. There might be a town around here, because, for a second there, he could have sworn he had seen someone. His laughter continued a beat too long.

"Stop that stupid laughing, right now," Elizabeth warned. "You know you sound like an ass when you laugh."

Tom became silent, the deer and the shadow forgotten when his eyes flicked across the instrument panel. He sucked in his breath in growing agitation. The gas gauge needle hovered over the "E" like a mother hen with only one chick. Finally, grudgingly, it crawled up a fraction.

His relief was short-lived.

The oil pressure began to dip, and he nursed the car along a few more miles, praying the needle would move upward.

But it just lay there, limp as his dick in Elizabeth's bed.

Eventually, the car could go no farther.

"Tom, why are we stopping? Are we out of gas?" Her voice held a note of disbelief as she dropped the partially devoured chicken wing back into the bucket. A line of grease dribbled down her chins, and Tom watched with interest. Watching her eat amputated chicken parts was kind of erotic.

Killing the engine, Tom steeled himself. "Elizabeth, how would you feel about taking a walk?"

She stared suspiciously at him, as if he had quite suddenly lost his mind. "We're in the middle of nowhere," she explained in the tone she always used to point out his more obvious mental deficiencies. "We're completely lost. And besides," she said, panic creeping into her voice, "it's getting dark."

"Dark is at least two hours away," Tom explained.

"I absolutely refuse to leave this car."

"Okay, suit yourself," Tom said, climbing out. After about ten yards or so, he heard the car door slam. He could feel her eyes burning holes between his shoulder blades, but he didn't look back. Another couple of yards, and he heard the swish of polyester that meant Elizabeth was on the move.

An hour later, Tom Cochran was trying to ignore the blisters sprouting on his left foot. His amputated right leg was giving him fits, too. Damn thing didn't fit right. As he hobbled along, snatches of last week's conversation came back to haunt him: "Come on, Elizabeth," he had coaxed, "we'll drive down to Miami and play it by ear. We'll call it our second honeymoon. Nothing planned. It'll be just like old times."

She had been reluctant, her expression suspicious. "There won't be any sex, will there?"

"No, no," he had pleaded, "we'll just go have a few laughs."

What with the flat tire earlier today, Elizabeth's constant nagging, and now this little hike, he'd had enough laughs to last him the rest of his life. Sometimes he fantasized about taking an ax to his wife. The arms and legs would be chopped off first. Definitely her arms and legs. The thought of her white, bloated, limbless body wriggling on a blood covered floor caused a small stir down there in the nether regions of his *Fruit of the Looms*, but he knew he didn't have it in him to commit violence.

So he contented himself with fantasies about his new secretary, Ms. Jenson. She too had a fake leg, just like him, but so far he hadn't been able to get her to remove it during sex. The idea of her pink nub touching his pink nub sent shivers running through him. He almost laughed with excitement.

Tom was so busy thinking about Ms. Jensen, replaying her breathy little moans, that he was caught by surprise when his wife tapped him on the arm. He looked up, guiltily. Boarded-up windows. Empty streets. Quiet. It was a town, or, to be more precise, what was left of one.

They walked closer. A blacksnake, injured, still writhing, was covered by ants and they were eating him alive. Elizabeth looked away in disgust. Tom smiled. This time, little things were eating big things and that pleased him somehow.

A sign, faded to near oblivion, clung to the side of an unpainted, dilapidated cafe. The faded words proudly proclaimed: "Big Al and Little Al." Beneath that, in small letters: "Make Us Your First Resort."

Tom looked around. A single red gas pump stood lonely sentry duty out front, and it had pumped its last when prices were at fifty-five cents a gallon. A few bungalows lined up behind the cafe like embarrassed relatives. Only the weeds were thriving. Everything else in town seemed dead or dying.

Elizabeth again yanked on his arm and pointed.

Parked in the middle of those weeds, like a diamond in a pile of rubbish, was a red, white, and blue tow truck that looked like it might actually run. One mud flap had a confederate flag painted on it, the other had an American flag.

They started toward the truck.

Tom heard the creak of wood and whirled around.



On the porch of the cafe, a small, wizened couple in overalls stared at them with owlish eyes. Both were embedded in rocking chairs and were rocking with a cadence that bespoke long practice. They were weathered dark brown and so old as to be sexless. Tom could identify with that.

"Evenin'," Tom ventured.

The small couple nodded, never losing a beat in their rocking. Tom waited for them to say something.

"Do you know where I might find Big Al?" Tom inquired after a bit.

"You're lookin' at him. This here is my wife, Alice, better known as Little Al." The rocking continued at the same leisurely pace. "You folks ain't from around here, are you?" the old man asked. The deliberate words implied a handicap far too serious to overcome.

Elizabeth moved closer to Tom's side, a whisper of polyester.

"Say, does that wrecker run?" Tom asked. "Maybe somebody could tow us to the nearest gas station?"

"You folks must be tourists. We don't get many of them 'round here parts," the old man reflected, ignoring Tom's question. He stared at them with glittering, amused eyes. "You musta wandered in off the main highway. You're walkin', so I 'spect you probably run outta gas."

"Well, it's a little more serious than that." Tom grinned. "I think I busted a hole in my oilpan. My car's about two miles up the road. Maybe we could . . . uh . . . call someone?"

"Ain't got no phone." The old man's wrinkled face screwed up for a moment, and then he continued as if divulging an ancient and confidential family secret. "My boy, Al Junior, works on cars."

"Don't you dare let those people touch our car!" Elizabeth whispered fiercely.

The old man continued on, as if he hadn't heard her remark. "That's his wrecker you been admirin'. Al Junior helps out part time at the garage over to--"

"Maybe he could tow us there?"

"No need," Big Al said in a voice that implied the family honor had been seriously impuned. The tempo of his rocking increased.

The silence grew uncomfortable.

Tom caved in. "Could you have him take a look?"

"See if you can get that no-account boy out here,"

Big Al directed, somewhat mollified, and his wife disappeared into the cafe. Disembodied voices floated back.

She finally emerged with a grossly overweight man of about fifty dressed in green workpants, a baseball cap, and a filthy t-shirt with an atomic mushroom cloud on it. Inscribed below the cloud was -- *MADE IN AMERICA, TESTED IN JAPAN*. The red, white, and blue suspenders he wore were obviously not equal to the formidable task presented them, because they left about three inches of fishbelly white stomach exposed. "Buy American!" was

tattooed on a meaty right arm.

It had to be Al Jr.

"Pleased'ta'meet'cha," he mumbled around a toothpick, unabashedly scratching a part of his anatomy not usually scratched in public, before extending the same greasy paw toward Edith. "I hear you got yourself a little car trouble."

Tom took pity on his wife, who appeared to be in the first stages of cardiac arrest, and shook the proffered hand. "Yeah, we do."

"It ain't no Toyota, is it?" Al Jr. inquired suspiciously.

Tom shook his head no. "It's a Volvo."

"That's German, ain't it?"

"It's okay, son," Al Sr. chipped in, "Germans is white."

Tipping his cap to Elizabeth, Al Jr. ambled past them and climbed up into the cab of his rust-eaten wrecker, pausing only for some more world-class scratching. He produced a key and the engine turned over a few times, each revolution slower than the last, until it gradually ground to a halt. It sounded like a tired dog trying to growl.

The huge man eased out, removed his toothpick, spat some tobacco juice into the dust, and lifted the hood. He reversed his baseball cap and studied the engine. This called for some contemplative scratching. With a grunt, he righted the cap, a blissful smile crossing his face as he took out a hammer and leaned into the engine compartment. A dreadful clanging ensued.

To Tom's amazement, the wrecker fired right up and Al Jr. eased it out onto the dusty road. A little congratulatory scratching, along with some grinding gears, punctuated his departure.

"Does he know what he's doing?" Elizabeth asked with a touch of alarm.

"Yeah, the boy's got a real delicate touch with machinery," the old man replied. "It's kinda amazin' to watch him in action."

"Amazing . . . just the word I would have used," Tom sighed.

Within ten minutes, Al Jr. returned in a cloud of dust with their station wagon in tow. "Busted gasket," he said, leaping down. "Take 'bout an hour to fix." He disappeared under the car like a walrus taking to water.

"Would you folks like to come in and have somethin' to drink?" Big Al asked. "We got some lemonade. Al Junior squeezed it with his own two hands, not more'n an hour ago."

Elizabeth gave Tom a look that threatened bodily harm.

"No, that's okay," Tom answered, "we had a coke in the car. Would you mind if we looked around a bit? These old places always fascinated me."

The old couple smiled proudly. And toothlessly.

"Help yourselves," Big Al invited. "Not much to see

anymore. Not since the innerstate took everybody away. Mind the back though, cause it's kinda swampy out there by the lake. The mosquitoes might carry you off."

Elizabeth wore a look of martyrdom as she swished along behind. Tom ignored her, picking up a pebble with his fake hand and preparing to skim it across the water.

"What's on your mind, Elizabeth? You look like I just asked you to have sex."

She frowned, didn't say anything.

Tom flung the pebble. A look of amazement crossed his face when his fake hand flew off. His pebble bounced only twice before taking a nose-dive, but his fake hand made five very spectacular skips. Dumbfounded, he stared at it as it gave him a final wave before sliding into the depths.

"Have you lost your mind?" Elizabeth asked.

"No, just my hand." Tom started to laugh, then thought better of it.

Out on the water, a huge bird plunged down and then flapped away into the setting sun. Tom couldn't tell what kind of bird it was, only that something had happened to it. He looked at it for a moment before he realized what was wrong. The bird had one leg.

"Weird old couple that runs the place," Tom said.

"Bet they went to the Norman Bates school of motel management." A leer crossed his face. "You want to take a shower together, Elizabeth." Something about his handless arm was turning him on. He laughed at his own little witticism.

"Stop laughing," Elizabeth said. "You know it gets on my nerves." She climbed up onto the dock, and Tom marveled. He had never seen her quite so energetic. She walked out over the flat, oily-looking surface. The planks creaked under his weight.

The sound was a little ominous.

"Elizabeth . . ." he cautioned.

"I dropped by your office last Friday," she said. "You didn't see me. I guess you were too busy taking inventory."

Tom's mind raced. What had he been doing Friday?

A slight pause while Elizabeth's hand dipped into her purse. "I trust all Miss Jensen's parts were in the right places? Nothing missing?"

Tom remembered. A line of sweat trickled down his backbone, cold as ice.

Elizabeth's face held a look of pure triumph, and, for an instant, Tom was certain she was going to come out with a gun and shoot him dead where he stood.

But she didn't.

What she had was worse than a gun, much worse.

She had photographs.

"Elizabeth, sweetheart--" he cajoled and began climbing the dock ladder. "It's not what you think."

"It's not? Silly me. Maybe I should show these to

my lawyer and see if he knows what to think." She held up a photograph. "It's a pretty good likeness, wouldn't you say? You can even see the mole on your left cheek."

"Elizabeth, I admit those are my cheeks, but that's not my . . . uh . . . face." He stared at the photo. "Jesus, I never noticed how hairy my ass is. You think that mole's getting bigger?" He laughed nervously. "Maybe I should get someone to look at it. Those things can turn cancerous, you know."

"Shut up, Tom. Your ass is in hot water and that's all you need to worry about. When I divorce you, we'll have to sell the business." An absolutely sunny smile lit up her face. "Oh, Tom, don't look so sad. You should be grateful to me. After all, taking inventory night after night has got to be hard for a man your age."

"Elizabeth, sweetheart, *baby* . . ." he sputtered, moving forward as she began backing away. Tom was nervous and, when he became nervous, he started laughing. Little shrill yips that he was unaware of.

A plank busted and Elizabeth's leg plunged through. She quickly yanked it back, and splotches of blood unfolded on her white pantsuit like a bouquet of roses. She looked down and her face went the color of spoiled milk.

"I cut myself!" Her face clenched in anger. "Stop that damned laughing. You sound like a terrier in heat."

And Tom sighed . . .

just before he pushed her into the water.

♦♦

Tom was whistling as he strolled up to the cafe porch. He pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his face. "Sure is a hot one, today."

Everyone nodded at the undeniable wisdom of that remark.

Tom sank down on the porch step and lit up a cigarette. Big Al pulled out his pipe and got it fired up. Soon, swirls of smoke, fanned by the evening breeze, drifted lazily across the porch. They sat in companionable silence. The rocking chairs continued at the same unhurried pace, their creaking filling the quiet.

The sun was going down, turning the swamps a fiery red. At moments like these, Tom wished he had learned to paint.

Finally, Al Jr. began yawning and scratching -- it was business-like scratching. "Your car's all fixed," he announced. "She's full of *Valvoline* and all gassed up." He wiped his hands on a greasy rag and stuck it in his back pocket. "I spect you'll want to know how big a chunk this is gonna set you back?"

Tom ground out his cigarette and stood, swiping at a bead of sweat that trickled down his nose. "So how much do I owe you?"

"Oh, I reckon 'bout fifty oughta cover the car." Al

Jr. paused and thought for a second. The toothpick did a flickering dance across his lips, like a fly with one wing. "For gettin' rid of your missus, and keepin' our mouths shut 'bout all the others..." The big man smiled, showing yellow teeth, "half the goin' rate." The smile broadened. "We'll just call it a discount for a volume customer."

The silence hung in the moist air, smothering Tom. This was definitely the last time. No more marriages -- ever. The whole thing was getting out of... well... he simply couldn't afford it anymore.

"Wives sure are expensive," Al Jr. pronounced, with the certainty of one well versed in these matters. He then paused for some philosophical scratching, which was slower and a lot more thoughtful.

"Yeah, they sure are," Tom said, as he stared solemnly at the ground. He thumped his artificial leg with his artificial arm and a sudden grin split his face. It grew to a chuckle. He fought hard to contain it, but, in the end, he was unable to control himself and he finally convulsed into peals of helpless laughter that had him in tears.

"They--" Tom wheezed, overcome, "can cost a man--" Wiping streaming eyes, gasping, "--an arm and a leg."

It occurred to him that only he was laughing, but he didn't care. He didn't care at all. Elizabeth was gone. His laughter continued to spew forth, brimming with desperation and madness, a clarion call as it floated out through the endless, blood-red mangrove swamps... growing louder... ever louder, rising to a fever pitch. And from the darkness, the screams of a small thing being devoured by a big thing mingled in ghastly harmony

-- until finally --

-- at the end --

it was impossible to distinguish between the two.

-- CD

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ANDREW VACHSS is known world-wide as an attorney specializing in matters concerning children and youth. His novels *Flood*, *Strega*, *Blue Belle*, *Hard Candy*, and *Blossom* are controversial, grim, and brutally honest. The following short-short exhibits all these qualities.

Just past midnight on the Old Motor Parkway, outside of town where there used to be factories. They closed the road down years ago -- when they closed the mills. Nobody uses it anymore.

My car was standing at the beginning of the two-lane crumbling blacktop road. Me looking straight ahead through the narrow slit of windshield on the chopped-down '49 Ford coupe, Wendy next to me in the passenger seat, her left hand on the inside of my right thigh, smoking. To her right, a new guy. In a snarling Mopar, giant rear tires raking the nose almost down to the pavement.

I didn't know him, an outsider, invading. He'd cruised into the drive-in, looking for me. Offered me out to the highway. Cash, pink slips, anything I wanted to play for.

People were watching. They always watch. I upped the stakes -- first man over the bridge takes it. His girl was a busty little brunette with a slashy red mouth, draping her heavy breasts over the window sill of his shiny car, watching us lay it out in the parking lot.

"Do it!" she told him.

Wendy just watched her. Arched her back. Nodded okay to me.

The road turns to dirt after the first bend and ends with a sharp hook-turn just before the abandoned wood bridge. There's no water under that bridge anymore. My little car was hunched over, waiting. Growling, ticking. I felt what it wanted to do.

Velvet-ink out there but I knew the road. I'd done this before. Slower, in daylight. Practicing my moves.

I pulled the switch for the cut-outs. The motor crackled now, unmuffled. We'd only have a few minutes before the Highway Patrol heard the noise and came after us. I'd be long gone.

They'd chased me before, knew who I was. But they'd have to catch me to hold me.

We don't use a flagman for these runs -- Wendy shouts out the count, a white silk scarf in her right hand. We go on Three. I'd feel her quick, sharp squeeze on my thigh just before she dropped the scarf -- that was my edge.

I blipped the throttle, looked past Wendy's profile to the other guy. He gave me the thumbs-up, grinning. She gave me a quick kiss -- as wet under her jeans as I was hard under mine.

I pressed down the heavy clutch, shrieked the potent engine, grabbed the floor shift and slipped it toward me and down. First gear. I telescoped my eyes down to the little bridge, spit my chewed cigarette out the window.

Wendy squeezed my thigh a micro-second before *Three!* as I dropped the clutch. The rear wheels clawed for a foothold and the Ford got burning sideways . . . straightened out and launched.

I was off first but he was closing. Couldn't see the tach needle -- I power-shifted into second, grabbed half a length on him. The bridge: I saw the hook-turn coming, pumped the brake with my left foot, squatting for the turn. The beast screamed on . . . ignoring me. It was too close. All by myself. One long second left. I gambled: clutch in, tromp the gas, ram the lever back into first. No time now . . . I popped the clutch, heard the vicious *crack!* as transmission dropped and we went freewheeling . . . no traction. Lost. The shift knob came off in my fist. I crouched low and whipped the wheels inside the opening to the bridge but it was no good -- the rear end slid out and hit the wall. We started to roll -- I dove for the floor, Wendy's blonde hair flying ahead of me. The icy metal of the shift lever stabbed into my mouth, shattering teeth and coming out my ripped cheek just as we went over.

I heard the sirens. Couldn't move. When the law came I was still pinned by the long stick, an insect on their spreading board. Everything in flames.

The young cop was crying when I came to and some white-coated liar was telling me how all right things were going to be.

-- CD



T. LIAM McDONALD INTERVIEWS PETER STRAUB

PROFILES IN TERROR

PETER STRAUB: The Violent and The Sacred PART I

There is something about the writing of Peter Straub that defies description. At once entertaining and extraordinarily literate and thematically dense, there is more to his books than the revenants, psychos, shape shifters, and monsters which populate the surface of all but his most recent works. There is always an undercurrent of true fear, that which cannot be totally hidden beneath horror's conventional forms. The evil that lurks within is explosive, seemingly ready to tear through its outer layer and accost the reader's psyche.

Peter Straub the man, as many have pointed out, is also not exactly the person he appears to be. Beneath this well-dressed, somewhat conservative gentleman there lurks an intellectual seething with visions of the bizarre, a man who as a writer continually twists reality and tears away the layers that hide true knowledge, a complex, somewhat driven artist. At one point in our interview he spoke of people who are always "one foot above the ground," and I couldn't help but think that this description might apply to Peter as well.

Straub was only seven years old when, like Tom Pasmore in *Mystery* (with the exception that Pas-

more was ten), he was struck by a car. The next year was spent in bed recuperating and reading a lot of books.



Photo Credit: Beth Gwinn

Straub admits that "there is a good deal of autobiography in Tom Pasmore. I couldn't remember what happened in the accident, or most of the period I spent in the hospital. In fact, a lot of that year is really gone. I reconstructed it as well as I could when I wrote about that period of Tom Pasmore's life."

When young Tom is hit by the car, he undergoes a classic near-death experience, complete with the bright light, the feeling of peace, the presence of lost relatives. Straub himself recalls something similar, but says it is "not really describable, so I better not fool myself by thinking I can describe it."

As one would expect, this trauma changed the child. "I probably became more cerebral. That's a nightmarish experience. It accounts for a sort of ongoing fear of ordinary life, which one represses and learns how to deal with, but which nonetheless is still there. I would venture a lot of horror writers happen to have this. Some write horror because they think they can make money at it, and some even say so, and to me they're very ineffective. They don't have much power, because they don't have any conviction. With the good ones I can tell they really know what they're talking about, and I suspect there's something, maybe small, maybe large that looms over them. Steve King, Karl Wagner, Ramsey Campbell, Dennis Etchison, Charlie Grant, Joe Lansdale, are some writers who seem to write with great integrity and authenticity."

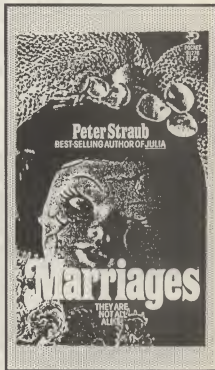
"For a long time in my life, there's been an attempt to stay on top of a barely recognized but pervasive fear. I did it alright, but it's still in part through denial, in part because I worked out a way to live that I didn't have to do a lot of the stuff I found uncomfortable. So I can spend my whole life in a room, I don't have to meet anyone I don't want to meet. I have a normal life in the world, but at the same time I have designed things so that my encounters with the outside world are pretty well-defined."

Straub recovered from his injuries, and had a fairly normal childhood and adolescence. Finally, feeling a need to escape his background in Milwaukee, he and his wife Susan moved to Dublin, where he studied at the University and began work on his thesis on D.H. Lawrence. This flight was partially motivated out of a desire for new experiences, but also because he felt the need "to really be able to make myself up in the way I wanted to. I would have done pretty much the same thing creatively if I had stayed in New York, but if I'd stayed in Milwaukee it would have been really hard because I would have had my parents and my wife's parents to satisfy. I could have only done that if they'd seen I was working at a job. I didn't want to. When I finally got a book published it solved all the questions, and five years later I started to make enough money to support us. But it took a long time to get to that point. We were in some borderline just above poverty."

Most of his creative energy was directed into the poetry (heavily influenced by John Ashbery) that would later be collected in *Leeson Park* and *Belsize Square* and *Open Air*. He met and befriended Thomas Tessier in Dublin, and the two would go on pub crawls, do poetry readings together and talk about horror and mystery writers. It was Tessier who got Straub back into reading horror by providing the "Thom Tessier Recommended Reading List," which included Lovecraft and his set, Matheson, Bloch, et cetera.

Still under the sway of an artistic ideology that shunned plot, he plunged into the writing of an impressionistic, prose-poetry oriented novel called *Marriages*. "When I decided to write a novel I knew that if I didn't do it at that time, it would be too late. I was about 26 or 27 and it seemed to me that was the time to really prove to myself that I could do it." Obviously he could: *Marriages* was published immediately in England and America, albeit in editions of only a few thousand copies.

Marriages is exactly the kind of novel one would expect a painfully literate young poet to write. The prose is stylish and strong, with well-drawn but ultimately un compelling characters and no real narrative drive. It is evidence of a massive talent trying to hone its skill and find some shape, but a shape never really emerges. The book suffered the fate such novels do: great reviews and terrible sales. Straub recognizes the importance of this first book in his development, but that doesn't mean he's overly proud of it: "I'm glad nobody read *Marriages*. I'm not really embarrassed by it, but when the time came to reprint it, I didn't."



With *Marriages* accepted, Peter scrapped his PhD thesis and, with his wife Susan, moved to London, where he immersed himself in the writing of his next novel: *Under Venus*, a contemporary mainstream novel like his first. Ultimately, it would mark one of the bleakest periods in his career as he struggled with it for two years between 1970 and 1972, only to have it rejected. No rewriting could save it, and later, in pain and desperation, he would finally move on to *Julia*. The irony is

that *Under Venus* is an altogether better novel than *Marriages*, more controlled, somewhat more focused, definitely more mature. When it was finally published along with *Julia* and *If You Could See Me Now* in the omnibus edition *Wild Animals* (and later in its own paperback edition), it received favorable reviews. The story of composer Elliot Denmark's return home to Wisconsin and his relationship with a former love has echoes of Joyce Carol Oates and Thomas Wolfe but, more importantly, provided the basis for *If You Could See Me Now*, which was still several years away. Straub's feelings about the book remain positive (more positive than *Marriages*) and *Wild Animals* is proof: when he had an opportunity to reprint *Marriages*, he chose not to, but did choose to publish *Under Venus*.

"I still thought *Under Venus* was good, and I can remember writing every word of it. I don't know where I'd be if it was published. I probably would have continued along in that vein for awhile, only I think I would have drifted towards the bizarre and the outre eventually. I always liked that, it always really spoke to me. I think the reason for that is because of what happened to me in my childhood. I think that sort of twisted my being, it moved the needle on my emotional spectrum up to the right end of the scale.

"With *Under Venus* I learned that I could carry what was in essence a 19th Century novel. I was capable of fitting together very interesting characters in a real world and seeing what happened when those people bounced off each other. I really felt good during the writing of a lot of that book. Occasionally, I was confused, or even lost, but I almost always found my way out, and the writing of it was a very satisfying experience. Then I edited it over and over, and rewrote a lot of it, and I thought that was also a good experience, because it taught me how to do that, too.

"It was tremendously painful

when it was rejected by both my publishers. And unlike anybody else, I just recalled it. I didn't tell my agent to send it out over and over. If he had, someone would have taken it, because it got good reviews when it finally was published. But I thought if my publishers didn't want it, then it needed fixing. So I spent two years trying to fix it, and I just sank into a hole. My agent finally said *Do something else*. That's when *Julia* finally came, and then I felt as if I were flying. I felt free. I knew that was going to work."

The fact that *Julia* was written to get away from the depression of *Under Venus'* rejection is evident in its grim tone. It marked Straub's first venture into the supernatural, and he chose the classic ghost story as his vehicle: a kind of souped-up, modernized gothic. He was delighted with the idea of working with a form that was new for him. "It meant that I could make it something new, and I could tell that it worked. The story had a kind of punch, a power within it. At that point I really started reading a lot of horror just to find out what it was like.

"It was important that, no matter what I wrote, I preserved my own voice. My feeling was that if I was going to write something that was like a ghost story, that it come out straight, that my voice be my real voice. And I can remember writing the first paragraph and feeling a tremendous relief that I was writing the way I would write anything else. From that point on I wanted to discover what was in that story. Writing that was the first time I really had the experience of having things join up with a huge clash of cymbals, things that I hadn't planned or foreseen. I knew that inside myself I was working better than I knew, that my unconscious was doing its work. I didn't think of it as a genre. I thought of it as a novel that used certain conventions and asked the reader to believe in certain unbelievable things."

The book's stark tone, it's somewhat detached voice, comple-

mented the narrative, and reveals something about the author's mood at the time of writing:

"I'd had various crises in my life at that point, and if the tone is sort of crisp and detached, that might have been my way to get above whatever pain I was in. I remember thinking that it was a really dark book, and that some of the anguish I was feeling was expressed obliquely in the book: all the stuff about murderous children and crazy old ladies and marriages gone to hell and the whole atmosphere. A good deal of that had to do with the feelings of having *Under Venus* rejected and having spent a long time trying to repair it. It was not a happy time."

In *Julia*, Julia Lofting is being driven crazy by what may or may not be a revenant in the form of her dead daughter Kate. The revenant (a vengeful spirit from the past) would remain a persistent plot device throughout his next two novels, manifesting itself in the form of Alison Greening (*If You Could See Me Now*) and "Alma Mobley" (*Ghost Story*). The importance of this plot device is its thematic resonance with all of Straub's work. One of his most important themes is the impact of the past upon the present; a theme which, when he stopped dealing with revenants, he continued to pursue in other forms.

Julia Lofting, Miles Teagarden, Elliott Denmark, the men of the Chowder Society, Coleman Collins, the entire town of Hampstead, all the vets in *Koko*, Tom Pasmore: none can escape the past of his parents. *Koko* claims that he lives *Backwards and forwards*, and it is true: he (and most of Straub's protagonists) can never escape the burden of history. *No story exists without its own past, and the past of a story is that which enables us to understand it* is a line from *If You Could See Me Now* that exemplifies Straub's approach to fiction. The writer is the chronicler of his characters' pasts, and is striving to understand how these pasts affect the present and the plot. All things touch in succession,

and one thing is affected by what came before.

"I think we are shaped and defined by our past," Peter admits. "We've had a lot of Freud by now. Things that happen to us in early life, the stories we hear from our parents, shape us and there's no way around it. The most one can hope for is to be aware of it. Nobody is really self-invented. I don't think we need to escape that, because it's part of the narrative that we all go through. The whole point is to understand as much of it as possible and not to be blind to it, not to imagine your angle on things is the only one."

cumbrance. But I found that I couldn't help but try to connect sequences of events with some sort of pulse, some sort of tension. I eventually realized that my gift lay in this direction. I had read so many novels that I was comfortable with that notion really. I knew the tradition of narrative in fiction. So by the time I came to *Julia* I was ready to turn the dial up three or four notches, to create more excitement at the same time that I wanted to leave myself open to be surprised, to discover connections that I hadn't preplotted."

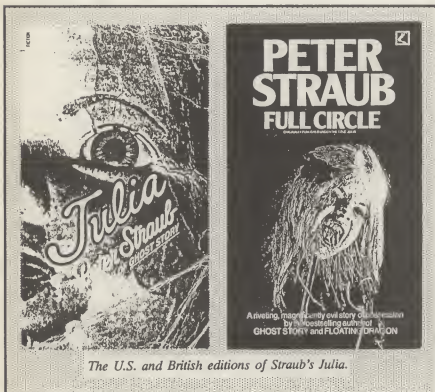
By now, the idea that Straub was ever a "plotless" writer seems

plagued, ultimately unsuccessful film) Straub went into another supernatural tale: *If You Could See Me Now*. This is the story of Miles Teagarden, who returns to his small hometown in order to keep a twenty-year-old pledge to his now dead cousin Alison. It is a novel of obsession and the ties that bind us to the past. The supernatural element is hazy, shifting, never clearly defined, and this is the novel's strength: the mystery surrounding Alison Greening persists through the end, and there are no real concrete answers. This is as it should be. To define horror is to diminish its power, and Straub has never gone for the flip solution or explained ending.

There is a point at which *If You Could See Me Now* (with its Chandler-esque narrator) can go either towards a crime ending or a supernatural ending. Indeed, the author wrote both but, as he explains, "I had a problem trying to figure out which ending had more integrity. The crime ending just never felt right. My editor at the time helped me to see what I could do to make the book right. But no matter what ending I used, I would have gone on to write *Ghost Story*. I knew I wanted to write something much bigger and more ambitious."

Ghost Story was written in England, after the Straubs moved out of the little house where *Julia* and *If You Could See Me Now* were written and into a substantially larger house bought with the money from the sale of film rights for *Julia*. Straub knew he was going to write something larger, something that would absorb the whole noble history of supernatural story-telling and refilter it through a modern, novelistic lens. In preparation, he immersed himself in Edith Wharton, Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and all the rest. His goal was to create some all-encompassing, super-charged modern gothic:

"I wanted to offer some sort of demonstration that there was no limit



The U.S. and British editions of Straub's *Julia*.

The change in Straub the writer and his whole outlook on creativity and fiction changed 180 degrees in the periods between *Marriages* and *Julia*. His aesthetic ideal evolved towards more traditional notions of narrative. "Anybody who starts off with John Ashbery," he points out "won't care much for narrative. I used to think that the whole business of 'story' was an old-fashioned en-

absurd. He is, more than almost any of his contemporaries, a severely plot-conscious writer. His novels have stories within stories, and he casts out tales and ideas as if they come from some indefatigable source. *Shadowland* exhibits this side of Straub best in that there seems no end to the supply of pure narrative.

Coming off the huge success of *Julia* (which included a financially

to what you could do within the confines of the supernatural novel . . . that it could be just as beautiful as any novel by anybody else, and that there was a long history of distinguished people doing it. That was my original impulse. I wanted to start off with old people telling stories, but I didn't know until Stephen King told me, that this was a terrible cliché, the oldest in the book. So I thought I could begin with all sorts of parodies of famous supernatural tales by American authors, but the only one I kept in the end was the Henry James one. By that time I had hundreds of pages, and I thought I'd have a novel that was all introduction . . . nothing but these stories that were supposed to lead into something else.

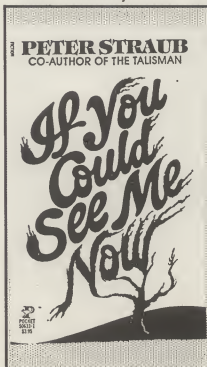
"I didn't really know what the inner story was going to be about, but I had so little trouble writing a lot every day that it didn't bother me. I just figured that when the moment came I would know what I needed to know. And I did. I said, *Oh, that's what it is! That's what these guys are going on about.* Then I knew what their problem was, and saw that I had built it in. So I wrote the whole thing all the way through from the first word to last. It was much longer. I took out one whole character and millions of scenes, because in those days they didn't want six hundred page novels. I'm not sorry. I'm not going to publish *The Complete Ghost Story!* Nobody ever told me they thought it was too short."

With *Ghost Story*, he was attempting to reinterpret the genre, but "only in the sense that I wanted it to be novelistic. I wanted everything to have a novelistic surround. That is: real settings, real people, actual motives for things. I wanted the writing to be good."

Published in the wake of the boom in horror, and at the beginning of Stephen King's meteoric climb to fame, *Ghost Story* was an enormous success that changed the author's life. Before he was even finished writing the first draft, he began to sense that this was shaping up to be something

very different than your average horror novel:

"I knew from about halfway through the writing that this was a much hotter, more powerful book than I had ever written, and that things were going to be different afterwards. I said to both my publishers: *This one is really something special, and it'll cost you some money.* They could tell I thought this was true, and I wasn't just trying to whip up their interest." He began planning what he would do with the extra money this book would bring, but in the end, he wasn't even close. The massive success of *Ghost Story*, one of the biggest bestsellers of the decade, so overshoot all of his (or anybody else's) expectations that he was totally unprepared. It put him on the map, and as it were, and made him one of the select few "brand name" authors in the country.



Ghost Story, even though it did revolve around an old cliché (old men telling stories) was unlike anything the genre had seen before. Intensely literate at the same time it was exciting and horrifying, it gave a new legitimacy to the horror novel, opening the door for a reading of

them as serious literature. It was also the final blow-out of the revenant in Straub's novels. Sears James, Ricky Hawthorne, Lewis Benedikt, and John Jaffrey, the old men of the Chowder Club, all share a very dark secret: the unintentional death (and resulting cover-up) of Alma Mobley. The old men, who regularly meet for stories, find themselves faced with the vengeful spirit/manitou/shapeshifter Alma Mobley, also known as Angie Maul or Ann-Veronica Moore. There are strong echoes of the classic ghost story, and a pervasive sense of Romanticism, of grandeur. The inclusion of a reworked version of Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw" (as transformed into the story of Fenny Bates) adds an extra dimension of literary tradition, firmly placing the novel in the classic mode. The problem was, of course, with inept literary critics who failed to see this as an homage, as in a joke, as an extra layer, and instead actually accused Straub of stealing from James. The story (which is even told by a character named James) ends with almost the same lines, so that only an idiot could have missed the point.

Straub is still, over a decade later, satisfied with *Ghost Story*:

"I think it's strong in the sense that once you get into it you really want to keep reading, and it does have those connections to the feelings inside a lot of Hawthorne. I think that counted. It is Romance with a capital R. Things are bigger, brighter, more explosive than they sometimes are in real life, and usually aren't in Margaret Drabble novels (though I love her novels). It's not like a well-made modest little novel at all. It's big and brash.

"The publishers really did get behind it, so there was a lot of publicity. At that point people were saying that the horror boom was going to end pretty soon and people weren't going to be buying these things in a year or so. That was 1979. People thought that was it, that this trash would die a natural death pretty soon. It seemed to me that as long as Steve

was writing books like that there would be no problem. It also seemed that as long as I was writing books like that there also wasn't too much of a problem, because I knew that these things were pretty good by anyone's standards."

Though many hardcore horror readers still cite *Ghost Story* as Straub's magnum opus, it was only a jumping off point. It was only a doorway to *Shadowland*, the masterwork of story-telling archetypes that can itself function as an archetype for the novel of magic realism. It is a novel that defines the term *Dark Fantasy*. There is a limitless supply of pure magic and wonder in *Shadowland*, which is seen from the perspective of two imaginative young boys (Tom Flanagan and Del Nightingale) who are spending the summer at a strange estate learning to be magicians. Their teacher is Del's uncle, Coleman Collins, himself a true magician, and *Shadowland* (his estate) is like an extension of Collins' warped psyche. The shifting realities and doorways to story-telling and magic are the boys' training grounds, their trial by fire in their quest to become magicians.

But, at its deepest and most important level, *Shadowland* is about stories and the power, magic, and inner life they have. Fairy tales are said to hold all the narratives and all the allegories of stories, and Straub mines these fairy tales in an attempt to find some central Jungian archetype for pure narrative. Indeed, the Brothers Grimm (who can be seen as the chroniclers of narrative archetypes) are residents of *Shadowland*,

and they aid Tom by telling him allegorical stories.

"I was after whatever inhabits the core of all stories," Straub recalls. "I had been persuaded that there was no bottom to the richness in narrative representation by the experience of writing *Ghost Story*. I had also recently had a child, and I learned that I could make up one fairy tale after another without any sense of limit, and they just disappeared the moment I said them. Eventually I did write some of them and these went into *Shadowland*, but there was a lot more. There seemed to be something big and universal right there, and if I could just write hard enough I could find it. I wanted to encompass whatever was in fairy tales, and I wanted to find a way to drag that up into late 20th Century life. The only way I could do that was to set it way out in the woods. It seemed important that whatever happened in the first half of the book, happened all over again in the second section, but on a bigger scale. I thought big gongs would go off in the reader's psyche, even if he didn't notice that things were being repeated.

"There is a sense of awe and mystery and danger. There's certainly a sense of the multifarious unfolding nature of the world, of the ambiguity in things, and of the millions of ways that the same experience can be shaped into one story or another story or another."

While *Shadowland* is about discovery, consolation, suspense, escape, entertainment, and magic, Straub believes that "it's also about qualities inside experience that tend

to be forgotten otherwise, but that do inhabit everybody. There must be some largeness of self in all people, as long as they or their parents didn't kill it. There is some big human inheritance to which narrative can awaken us, but as to what it is, I don't know.

"I discovered in *Ghost Story* what I took to be the core of what I was about in certain moments: when people look at something and reality just blows apart. What I was writing about was the point at which illusion and reality melted, and *Shadowland* and *Floating Dragon* were all about that. What it amounts to is a supposition that maybe reality doesn't exist at all, and that everything is open to question."

These reality-shattering themes he would explore later in *Floating Dragon*, one of the gaudiest horror novels of the '80s. It is a book that has the feeling of a horror free-for-all, and one that gives the impression of a man who has said all he has to say in the form of the supernatural novel.

End of Part I

NEXT ISSUE: The conclusion of T. Liam McDonald's interview with Peter Straub takes us from *Floating Dragon* and *The Talisman*, through *Koko*, *Mystery*, *Houses Without Doors*, and beyond.



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JULIAN'S HAND

GARY BRANDNER

GARY BRANDNER is best-known as the creator of *The Howling* series and the author of over two dozen novels, including the recent, *Doomstalker*. Look for Brandner's "Biting the Big One" in the next issue of *Cemetery Dance*.

At first it was only an itch, an irritation of the skin under his left arm; nothing more.

Julian scratched idly at the spot while he shaved. Shaving was the only thing he still did naturally with his left hand. In all other actions he had been converted in early childhood to conform to a right-handed world.

He blew the whiskers out of his electric shaver and rinsed them down the sink drain, mopping the porcelain clean with a sponge. Before leaving the bathroom he turned sideways to examine the itch in the mirror. There was a slight reddening in a spot the size of a dime -- an insect bite, or maybe some allergy. Julian dabbed medicated salve on the spot and rubbed it. He finished dressing and went out to the kitchen.

Margaret, her bright little eyes watching him, sat at the table. Julian poured a cup of coffee from the electric percolator and carried it over to sit opposite her. It was bitter. After sixteen years of marriage he still missed sugar in his coffee. Margaret had shown him the statistics that proved he was better off without it. It was easier to drink his coffee black and bitter than to argue with her.

She did have a point. It was a man's responsibility to his family to take care of himself. At one time Julian had hoped his family would consist of more than just Margaret. A son would have been nice, but it wasn't Margaret's fault that she was not built for childbearing. Was it?

"Don't scratch yourself like that," Margaret said.

"Sorry."

"You look like an ape."

"I didn't realize I was doing it."

"Are you going to talk to Hugh Biggerstaff today?"

"Talk?"

"Don't play games. I mean talk about the opening in the Sales Department, as you know very well."

"I'll see him if I get a chance."

"Make the chance. He's not going to walk out there and hand you the job, you know."

"I suppose not."

"It may be too late now. You should have gone in to see him last week."

"We've been very busy."

"I'll bet. You just get in there today and tell Hugh Biggerstaff that you're the man for the job. The years you've been with that company, you should be making a lot more money than you are, and it's obvious you're not going to make it in Accounting. Sales is where the money is. And Sales is where they pick the top executives from."

"I'll talk to him today," Julian promised.

"You're scratching again."

Julian finished his coffee and rinsed the cup at the sink. He leaned down to kiss the air an inch from Margaret's face and left the apartment. He drove downtown to the high-rise office building where he worked, and parked in the subterranean garage. He stepped into the elevator and touched the button for the twelfth floor where the offices of Datatron Systems, Inc., were located.

The elevator stopped at the street-level lobby and the girls who worked in the building got on. Bright eyed and colorful, they chattered about their dates and their clothes and always made Julian feel good. They smelled of cologne and hair spray and soap. The heat of their firm young bodies warmed the elevator car, and for the short ride upward Julian savored the nearness of the girls. At each floor, as more of the girls got out, he felt a growing ache of loneliness. By the twelfth floor he was the only one left. He stepped out into the carpeted corridor and rubbed at the rash under his arm.

The first three hours were occupied with the regular entries, checks, and cross-checks that Julian made every day. He never found these tasks dull or routine. He enjoyed beginning his day in an orderly manner and then he would be ready for any new problems that arose in Accounting. On this day there were no new problems, and by eleven o'clock he had no further justification for not talking to Mr. Biggerstaff.

To stall just a little longer, Julian went into the men's room and combed his thinning hair, then reknotted his necktie. He scratched once more under his arm and walked down the hall to the oak-paneled office of Hugh Biggerstaff, ready to get it over.

Julian tapped lightly on the open door and stood there several seconds while the vice-president of Datatron Systems Inc, finished what he was writing before he looked up to acknowledge Julian's presence.

"Come on in, Julian. Glad to see you." Hugh Biggerstaff had taken off his jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeves two turns, just like one of the fellows. Curly black hair spilled across his unlined forehead. "What can I do for you?"

Julian's throat tightened, and his voice squeaked out with even less authority than usual. "Um, I was just wondering if you've found someone to fill the opening in Sales yet."

"No, actually we haven't firmed up the decision. Why, is it causing some problem in Accounting?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that. It's, well, it's..." Julian had to stop and clear his throat. "I was thinking that I'd like to be considered for the position."

"You?" That was all, just the single questioning syllable.

"Ah... yes."

The young vice-president stared intently at Julian, who fought down the impulse to look away. Hugh Biggerstaff put a lot of stock in eye contact.

"Julian, do you have any kind of sales experience?"

"No, but I learn quickly. And I'm a diligent worker."

"I'm sure of that. I checked your record when the home office first sent you out here, and I've watched your work since. I don't mind telling you, Julian, you're one of DSI's most valued employees."

"Thank you."

"In fact, I'd really hate to have the job of replacing you. You may not know this, Julian, but men who can handle the kind of work you do are hard to find. I couldn't take some kid fresh out of business school and put him at your desk. No way. The Sales job, heck. I could find a dozen men to fit that, but to replace a first-class Accounting man... well, that's another story."

"Are you saying I'm not right for the Sales job?"

"No, I'm saying the Sales job is not right for you. I came up through Sales myself, and I can tell you it's not all long lunches and expense accounts. There's a lot of being nice to people you can't stand, and a lot of forcing yourself to be pushy and aggressive when you're not that way at all. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Good, good, I'm glad that's settled. Come around any time, Julian. We don't get together nearly enough, you and I." The vice-president shifted slightly in his chair, indicating that the interview was over.

"Thank you," Julian said, and backed out of the office.

Back at his own desk Julian let his fingers dance across the keys of his calculator. He hummed along with the clicking of the machine. His obligation was fulfilled, he had kept his promise and asked for the job. It was not his fault that the company found him more valuable here in Accounting.

He thought of Margaret, and his fingers stopped their dance. He rubbed at the renewed irritation under his arm. If only she would understand that things had worked out for the best.

Margaret understood nothing of the kind. That evening she made Julian repeat the entire conversation

with Hugh Biggerstaff as nearly word for word as he could remember.

"So you just thanked him and walked out," she said when Julian had finished his recitation. "You didn't even argue your case. Couldn't you see he was testing you to find out if you're forceful enough for the job? Don't you know you've got to pound on a desk sometimes to make people pay attention to you? Hugh Biggerstaff didn't get where he is by mumbling thank you, you can bet on that. He's a desk pounder."

The same theme was repeated with little variation for the remainder of the week and through the weekend. The next Monday morning when Julian stood shirtless before the mirror he saw that the rash under his arm had congealed into a lump; no bigger than an orange seed, but a definite lump. It no longer itched, and it was not painful. It was just... there -- and growing.

Tuesday morning the lump was visibly larger -- the size of a bean. By Wednesday it was as big as the end of his thumb, and Julian was frightened.

That afternoon he called his physician, Dr. Aaron Volney. The doctor was busy attending an AMA luncheon, but his receptionist made an appointment for Julian the following morning.

When Julian awoke Thursday the lump was as big as a walnut.

"Hurry up or you'll be late for work," Margaret said.

"I'm not going to work this morning. I'm going in to see Dr. Volney."

"Did the company give you time off?"

"They gave me time off."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I just want the doctor to look at something."

"Pick up a quart of buttermilk on your way home."

At the age of fifty-three Dr. Volney was tanned and youthful, with a spring in his step and a twinkle in his eye, a model of good health for his patients to envy. Golf, tennis, boating, and leisurely vacations kept him that way.

"Well, well, Julian," the doctor beamed, "what brings you around between annual checkups? Looks like it wouldn't hurt you to put on a little weight. A lot of my other patients would like to hear that, I'll bet, ha-ha."

"I have this lump under my arm," Julian said. "It started last week. First there was a rash, then a lump. It's getting bigger."

"Well, let's get the old shirt off and have a look-see, shall we?"

Julian fumbled with the buttons.

"Now, don't get yourself all upset," the doctor said. "This could be any of a hundred different things. It doesn't have to be what you're worrying about."

"I wasn't worrying about anything in particular."

"Of course you were. These days the whole world is cancer-conscious. I'm not saying that's bad, mind you. It's just that people tend to get frightened to death over nothing."

Julian stripped off his shirt and undershirt and laid them aside. He raised his left arm to show Dr. Volney the swelling. The doctor touched the lump with his fingers and prodded the flesh around it.

"Have you been under a mental strain lately?"

"There was a problem at work."

The doctor was pleased. "There you are, it's just as I thought. This sort of thing is often caused by nothing more than a temporary nervous condition."

"But it's growing."

"Or it might be caused by some minor glandular disturbance."

"But, Doctor, isn't it just possible that I've got--"

"Cancer? Sure, there's always that chance, but don't start shopping for a burial plot until we find out for sure, ha-ha. I'll just hack off a piece and we'll send it out to the lab."

Dr. Volney selected a gleaming scalpel from his instrument case and drew it lightly over the lump under Julian's arm. He wiped the small scraping of flesh onto one glass slide and sealed it with another, then returned to his desk with a smile of professional reassurance.

"I'm going to give you a prescription for a light sedative, something to help you relax. Call me on Friday. And give my best to Norma."

"Margaret," Julian said.

"Of course."

By Friday the lump had doubled in size. There still was no pain, but Julian could feel the thing with every movement of his left arm. He called Dr. Volney four times, but each time reached an answering service. The answering service could not locate the doctor.

Julian spent much of the weekend locked in the bathroom, staring into the mirror at the growth under his arm. The original lump now had its own tiny lumps -- five of them. The foreign thing on his body horrified and fascinated him. Sometimes he fancied he could see it growing.

On Monday Julian finally got through to Dr. Volney. "I tried to get you all day Friday, Doctor."

"Yes, sorry, but I was tied up in court all day testifying for an old classmate. Some trumped-up malpractice suit. You wouldn't believe the way some people try to take advantage of us."

"Doctor, about the lump under my arm . . ."

"I've got good news for you about that. The results of the biopsy were negative. It's nothing."

"But the thing is still growing," Julian said. "It has little ones."

"Julian, you do *not* have cancer."

"I don't care what I have, the thing is ugly and getting uglier. I want it removed."

"As you wish." The doctor sighed. "I'll make the arrangements for you to have surgery at Queen of Mercy sometime next week. Check back with me in a few days."

The days passed and Julian did not check back with the doctor. At the end of the week Dr. Volney called him.

"I have you all set up, Julian. You'll sign into the hospital Sunday evening. I'll be in to see you Monday morning before you go to surgery."

"I changed my mind," Julian said.

"What's that?"

"I don't want any surgery. I'm all right."

"Of course you want surgery. I've made all the arrangements."

"Send me a bill," Julian said, and broke the connection before Dr. Volney could reply.

As soon as he hung up the phone Julian went back into the bathroom and locked the door. He pulled off his shirt and stared at what was growing under his arm. He recognized the thing now. It had assumed enough of a shape so anyone could tell what it was -- a hand; a tiny baby hand.

Julian was not going to let Dr. Volney and his friends get a look at it. They would treat him like some kind of freak. He could imagine the sensation it would make. Those tabloids they sell in supermarkets would love it: **MAN GROWS THIRD HAND**. Julian leaned his forehead against the cool glass of the mirror and cried like a child.

In the following weeks the hand grew rapidly. In less than a month it matched the hand of a four-year-old child. After seven weeks the new hand was as large as Julian's own. There the resemblance stopped. The new hand was smooth and devoid of features. No nails, no lines, no knuckles, it looked rather like a rubber glove blown full of air. It was tough and resilient to the touch, and slightly cooler than body temperature.

The thing was also growing an arm. When the hand reached full size, a rubbery, tubelike appendage began to push it out from Julian's side.

As first the hand, then the arm grew, Julian had to make some changes in his lifestyle to prevent detection. The first thing he did was to stop sleeping with Margaret. The adjustment was not overly difficult, since both of them had long before ceased to enjoy sharing a bed. Margaret readily accepted Julian's plea of insomnia, and he moved to the living room sofa.

He began wearing larger jackets to work, and kept them on all day. At home he would change immediately into a loose-fitting robe, which he wore until Margaret went to bed.

As time passed, familiarity with his new appendage made it appear less hideous to Julian. He began to experience a sensual pleasure in examining the hand and touching it. Holding the inert fleshy thing between his

own two hands gratified him in a way he could not fully understand. He had a notion that somehow this made up for the son that Margaret would never give him.

Then the hand came to life.

For some time Julian had been aware of its developing sense of touch. He enjoyed placing various objects on the smooth palm. The feel of the different surfaces registered on his brain in an entirely new way. It became like a game as Julian introduced the hand to new textures and temperatures. Then one day it moved. Julian was delighted to find that by concentrating his will he could make the hand obey simple commands. After a few days of practice the fingers could bend individually and grasp objects, and the hand could move about on its flexible tube of an arm. Soon it was as adroit as Julian's original hands. He began to feel a paternal pride in its accomplishments.

The first indication that the hand had begun to act on its own came when Julian found small articles from the office unaccountably turning up in his pockets at night: a roll of stamps, a stapler, a plastic tape dispenser. Julian's first shocked reaction was to return the things the following morning. Then he asked himself, why should I? Everybody else in the office stole whatever they could get away with. Why not? Datatron Systems Inc., had plenty of money.

Julian put the stolen items away in a desk drawer, then sat down and wrote several personal letters, using the office stamps. The experience was exhilarating.

His attitude toward the hand became that of an indulgent parent toward a mischievous son. Although he was amused by the hand's little escapades, Julian resolved to exert more control over its behavior.

The hand seemed content to obey him until one morning a week later in the elevator. The car stopped at the lobby, and the usual flock of secretaries got on. Julian moved as always to the rear of the car as the girls crowded in. Somewhere between the fifth and sixth floors the girl directly in front of him gasped and arched her back in surprise. Julian looked down and was aghast to see the hand protruding from beneath his jacket and fondling the girl in a way Julian himself would never have dared. Although he concentrated mightily to pull the hand away, it stayed where it was, sending the most delightful touch sensations back to his brain.

Deliberately the girl turned and speared Julian with her eyes. Only then did the hand let go and slip back out of sight. All Julian could manage was an apologetic shrug. The girl, a well-built brunette whom Julian had admired from a distance, lifted one expressive eyebrow and turned away.

For the rest of the day Julian kept his left arm pressed to his side to be sure the hand stayed under his jacket. His unusual posture drew some curious looks, but the hand remained hidden.

On the way home he stopped at a drugstore and bought a rolled bandage and a spool of adhesive tape. The next morning before leaving for work he wound the bandage around his upper body, binding the hand to his side, and made it fast with adhesive tape. It was not a comfortable arrangement, but Julian could no longer risk leaving the hand free.



Riding up in the elevator that morning he prayed that the brunette would not be among the girls who got on his car.

She was, of course.

He was too tall to lose himself among the other passengers, and to his acute embarrassment he found himself once again immediately behind the girl. He prayed that she would not turn around.

She did, of course. Julian was astonished to see that she was smiling.

"Hi," she said.

"Uh, hello."

"You're Julian Dunbar, and you work on the twelfth floor for DSI."

"How did you know?"

"I've known for a long time. I was curious about you and I asked somebody who you were. Aren't you curious about me?"

"Very much."

"I'm Tina Cross. I've worked on the sixth floor for months, and I was beginning to wonder if you'd ever speak to me." The girl laughed softly. "Well, you didn't exactly *speak*, but you did make contact -- you did get in touch."

Julian could scarcely believe this was happening to him. He groped for something to say to the girl.

She said it for him. "I'm through work at five o'clock."

"So am I," Julian managed. "Will you have a drink with me after work?"

"I'd love it. Meet me in the lobby."

Julian spent the day in an agony of anticipation. This adventure was completely outside his experience. He even forgot about the discomfort of having the hand bound to his side. Before leaving, he went into the men's room to make sure the thing was still secure. It would never do to have it flop out on his first date with Tina.

The drink after work stretched into several drinks. Julian found himself talking and laughing freely with a girl for the first time in years. He remembered, however, to keep his right side toward Tina. He did not want her to brush accidentally against the bulge under his left arm.

Later, when he took Tina home to her apartment, he kissed her. It was a short kiss, and light, but it promised that this was only the beginning.

The hand remained the only obstacle in the way of a satisfactory relationship. Although he had grown used to the thing, Julian could guess at the disgust it would arouse in others. To his immense relief, the problem was easily solved after all.

In the first place, Tina offered no objection to keeping the bedroom totally dark for their intimacies. She even found it amusing that he chose to wear a soft, loose-fitting shirt at all times. For his part, Julian became quite adept at moving his body just far enough so Tina's caressing hand would not encounter the thing taped to his

side. With these minor adjustments, Julian gave himself over fully to the pleasure of the affair.

At home he no longer bothered to alibi his absences. Margaret complained bitterly at first, but confronted by Julian's new indifference, soon lapsed into puzzled silence. The situation might have continued indefinitely had not Julian failed one night to lock the bathroom door.

He had left Tina earlier than usual, and was standing naked in the front of the mirror letting the hand move about, free of its constricting bandage. Without warning, the door burst open and Margaret faced him, hands planted on her bony hips.

"What are you doing in here so long, washing off the smell of your girlfriend? Oh, yes, I found out who she is and where she works. Right there in the same building. Very handy for you, I must say. It has been up to now, anyway. Tomorrow I'm paying a little visit to Miss Tina Cross, and I think things will change pretty sud--"

The speech died in Margaret's mouth as Julian turned to face her. Her eyes fastened in horror on the thing growing from his side. The hand rose on its tubular arm and stretched toward her like a fleshy snake.

When Julian regained control, the body of his wife lay half in and half out of the bathroom. Her upturned face was dark and swollen like an eggplant. The hand hung limp and heavy at his side. Julian stared down at it. How could he ever have accepted this monstrosity as a part of himself? It was clear now what he must do, what he should have done long ago.

Stepping over the corpse, he walked into the kitchen. From a wooden rack screwed into the wall he selected the heaviest of a set of carving knives. He honed the knife in the electric knife sharpener and tested the edge against his thumb. Satisfied, he spread newspapers across the tabletop and sat close in a chair.

He took hold of the hand and pulled it out across the newspapers. It lay docile in his grasp. Julian pulled in deep lungfuls of oxygen, trying to slow the hammering of his heart. He poised the knife in front of his face, his fingers gripping the bone handle. It had to be done in a single blow. He would never have the courage to hack at it a second time. Slowly he brought the edge of the blade against the rubbery skin at the point where the arm grew from his side.

The hand jumped in his grasp.

... the deaths were labeled double homicide by detectives. Dunbar apparently tried to fight off the attacker with a kitchen knife, wounding himself in the attempt. A massive search is underway for the assailant, described by police as immensely powerful, based on evidence that he strangled the victims using only one hand.

-- CD



LORI PERKINS

DREADFUL PLEASURES

THE CIPHER by Kathe Koja, Dell/Abyss (356 pp.), Feb. 1991

NIGHTLIFE by Brian Hodge, Dell/Abyss (404 pp.), March 1991

DUSK by Ron Dee, Dell/Abyss (369 pp.), April 1991

While other mass market publishers are slashing their horror lists because the market is glutted with too many "haunted houses, evil children, and Indian burial grounds," Dell is launching a new line of horror fiction "unlike anything you've ever read before." That's a tall order.

The debut novel in the new Abyss line is *The Cipher* by Kathe Koja, and it certainly is different than everything I've been reading the last few years. It's a more old-fashioned horror novel of the mind, peopled with the post-punk jaded youth of the late eighties--Bret Easton Ellis meets Edgar Allen Poe.

Video store manager Nicholas lives in a one-step-above tenement building that features a black hole that comes alive only when he enters the room. This "funhole" (the original title of the novel, which I feel works better than the present one, but I understand why they changed it; for what it's worth, I think they should have titled the novel *Hell Hole* or *The Abyss*) does weirdness to everything that Nicholas' oddball sorta

girlfriend Nakota (aka Shrike, aka Jane!) throws into it. The first offering is a jar with live insects which turns into fossilized paisley runes; the next is a live mouse that comes back in solid pieces. Nakota then "borrows" a human hand from a pathologist friend and when this goes down the funhole, it comes back alive for a few seconds. She then sends down a camcorder, which picks up wonderful images that are different for each person who views them. They constantly change for everyone, except Nicholas.

That's about as much of the plot that I want to reveal except to say that the funhole becomes a mecca for a bunch of downtown art asshole types who prove to be Nicholas' personal demons.

The Cipher kept me going back for more. I wanted to know what crazy Nakota was up to. I couldn't guess what she'd do next, which is certainly different from everything I've read recently.

The writing's not bad either; at least two cuts above the child in jeopardy novels. "... in a tone so shockingly intimate that my whole body flushed, I felt the warmth go through me like a fever, like pain, as if your own mind could speak to you in a tongue you never knew you knew, but recognized at once; as if, foreign-born, came your first exposure to

your native language, and those first words "I love you." And below that I was simply scared shitless, a postcard from the devil, or more ominously a collect call from God himself, will you accept the charges?"

Nightlife by Brian Hodge is the second entry in the new Abyss line. For those of you who don't know this, I am a literary agent who specializes in horror and one of my newer clients is Brian Hodge. When I agreed to write this review column, I promised myself, and Richard Chizmar, that I would not review any of my client's novels, or novels by former clients, or novelists I knew socially. So, since I now represent Brian Hodge, I don't feel comfortable saying anything more about *Nightlife* other than it's a novel about a new drug that induces shape-changing, and it convinced me that I should represent Brian Hodge.

Dusk by Ron Dee is the April title from Abyss. Unlike *The Cipher*, this novel is a lot like many of novels I've read recently, but that's okay with me since I love a good, or even mediocre, vampire novel, which this is. *Dusk* is *Live Girls* meets *Near Dark* meets *They Thirst*, except that it's set in Dallas. There are some nice, new touches to this vampire story, most notably that the purity of

(Con't on page 30)

A Conversation with JOE R. LANSDALE

Conducted by GARY RAISOR



Photo Credit: Beth Gwinn

GARY RAISOR: Would you introduce yourself, the vital stats, that sort of thing?

JOE R. LANSDALE: I'm 39 years old. Born in Gladewater, Texas. 5'11. 170 pounds. Married with two children. One boy, eight years old. One girl, four years old. I live in Nacogdoches, Texas. Have been a full-time writer since 1981.

GR: How did a poor boy and jack-of-all-trades from East Texas ever get started writing in the first place?

JRL: I've always wanted to write; I can't remember not wanting to. It seemed to me to be the only profession I could do day in and day out and be happy with.

GR: You've written a lot of horror. Why?

JRL: First of all, one of the things that attracted me was I liked scary stories. I think we're all fascinated, to some degree, by violence and the unknown. Once we recognize the violent nature that we have in ourselves, we're more likely to do something about it. It's a way of giving ourselves short doses of the inevitable -- death.

GR: You've said a time or two that you've said all you have to say in the horror field. Do you think you'll ever return to it?

JRL: Though I have said that, and sometimes feel that way, I never say never. I don't seem to have much to say in the traditional vein. A short story collection that I have forthcoming from Pulphouse Publishing entitled *Stories by Mama Lansdale's Youngest Boy* pretty well covers 50 percent of the stories that I wrote in the traditional horror vein, at least as traditional as I get. I think there will be more traditional stories, but I don't know that they'll be traditional horror stories.

GR: Why do you feel compelled to push what, many would say, are the bounds of good taste?

JRL: I don't consciously do that. I just write the stories that appeal to me. Stories that have some relationship to every day life: things I see happening around me, hear from others, read in the newspaper. Sometimes I write stories purely as metaphors, things that surround me and scare me.

GR: Recently you've turned to writing crime and suspense. Why?

JRL: I really don't see a tremendous division between where my writing has been going over the past six or seven years, and the crime and suspense tales that I'm writing now. Remember that when I started writing, my first sales were in the mystery, crime, and suspense fields. And when you look at many of my horror tales, they often have a crime angle and many are not supernatural. I doubt that I can stay in any one field completely.

GR: You've said that your writing is going in a totally new direction. Can you tell us what to expect in the future?

JRL: I've shifted gears again, but I don't know how to describe it. In the next two years, around 1992, you're gonna start seeing totally different types of tales from me. That doesn't

mean you won't recognize me, but I've never tried to keep up with my audience; they have to keep up with me, and if they can't or prefer not to, I'm sorry.

GR: How much of the real Joe Lansdale comes through in your writing? I.E. Are you really the sick puppy everyone thinks you are?



JRL: I don't know; I don't think I'm a sick puppy. I'm just fascinated by them. I'm very much a family man, and I hope at least a fairly good one. I'm a small town kind of guy; reasonably conservative at heart. I'm more of a literary anarchist than a political anarchist. Politics, day to day life... I'm primarily a middle-of-the-road type person, but I think that's more of an advantage for a writer, because I'm less inclined to have a definite agenda. I fortunately, and unfortunately, can see a number of view points and though I may not agree with all of them, I can get into their skins and write from different angles. The angles that fascinate me generally are those that are farthest afield of my own views.

GR: What's the best thing about

being a writer?

JRL: The writing.

GR: The worst?

JRL: The financial insecurity, and the fact that each time out you want to do a better job than before and that's not always possible.

GR: Have you ever written anything that made you stop and say: "Hey, maybe I went too far this time, maybe I should back off?"

JRL: I've written things that have disturbed me. "Drive-in Date" in *Night Visions 8* probably bothers me more than anything I've ever written. So I knew that little buddy had to be in print.

GR: Of your own writing, what's your favorite short story? Novel?

JRL: "Night They Missed the Horror Show." I think it did everything I wanted it to do within my human abilities. For novel, it varies between *The Magic Wagon*, *The Drive-in*, and *Cold in July*. Those three are very different from each other and yet each seems to be able to accomplish what I intended them to do as best as I've ever been able.

GR: A lot of your novels are very short, which goes against conventional wisdom in the publishing business. Why do you write short novels?

JRL: That's just how long the stories are. A novel that I'm planning to write next year probably will be long because that's how long the story is.

GR: A good part of your work concerns racism in our society. Why does this issue crop up again and again in your writing?

JRL: That's simple. It's one of the things that bothers me more than anything else. People worry about the atomic age and being blown off

the planet, but I think it's much more likely that we'll self-destruct, and it's one of the things that frightens me and not just because I'm from the South. I see it everywhere. Personally, I don't see that the South is any more racist than anywhere else. I think it's funny that when people in the North or West experience it they act surprised, but when it occurs in the South they act like it's status-quo. I'm offended by that.



GR: These days, horror is hard pressed to keep pace with our violent reality, don't you think? What do you see in the future of horror? Can it keep pace?

JRL: I think that that's one reason so many writers are turning to crime and suspense -- to real horrors. I do think, however, that people will reach a barrier with that and that the trend will turn back to more supernatural traditional horrors, which will be used as a release, which is why many readers originally turned to horror, and which is why I feel that much of my work fails to satisfy readers' expectations. At least, in this point and time.

GR: Would you tell us a little about the Lansdale stories in this issue?

JRL: "Bestsellers Guaranteed" is one of the stories that I felt had not gotten enough play. I like the story and it is

considerably different in voice and tone from my recent work. Strictly speaking, it's a more traditional tale, but it was written out of frustration because at the time, 1983, when I wrote "Bestsellers Guaranteed" I had already written a number of the stories that I'm now known for, but couldn't sell them anywhere. I was so frustrated that I decided to "mute" my voice and write a more traditional sort of story. But if you read between the lines you can certainly touch on the frustration that drives the story's engine.

"Drive-in Date" -- the play version -- is based on a short story in *Night Visions* 8. The story and the play are probably influenced by Henry Lee Lucas and his buddy Otis, or at least the stories they told about themselves. It makes no difference if those stories are false; the stories themselves disturbed me and frightened me enough that one night I woke up with this one in my head and had no choice -- the same way that a constipated man has no choice but to shit -- to take a laxative at the typewriter and get this nasty turd of a story out of my head.

GR: What upcoming projects can we look for?

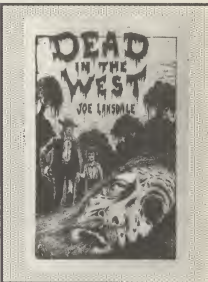
JRL: I'm doing a Batman novel, called *Captured by the Engines*, a Batman adventure in five gears. I'm hoping it will be fun and echo both Batman and Lansdale. There will be a comic book project with Mark Nelson for DC, prestige format, in four parts. Followed by a novel that I've been nursing for two years, a novel that I think will be as fast-paced and exciting as *The Nightrunners*, but I hope will echo my more recent concerns as exemplified by *Cold In July* and *Savage Season*. To be perfectly honest, I'm avoiding talking about it directly. I don't normally feel that at least giving a general synopsis of a story will harm my ability to write it, but in this case I've developed a sort of superstition.

Let's just say I have high hopes.

GR: What makes Joe Lansdale happy?

JRL: I'm happy right now. My family, my writing, reading good books and stories, good bowel movements, plenty of ice tea. I'm a pretty simple kind of guy, I guess.

GR: What keeps Joe Lansdale awake at night?



JRL: Mexican food, popcorn, and the kind of dreams they give me.

GR: When all is said and done, what would you like said about you, as a man, as a writer?

JRL: He was a good man and he did his best.

-- CD

DREAD NOTES (Con't from page 27)

silver drains the bloodsuckers of their supernatural powers. So, when this pack of western vampires build their nest on an abandoned silver mine, it becomes evident that this is not such a good idea.

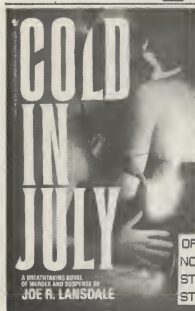
The Abyss line looks to be a welcome addition to the horror market which will offer readers both the new and unusual, as well as the familiar with a new twist.

-- CD

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DRIVE - IN DATE

JOE R. LANSDALE

"Drive-in Date," the play version, is somewhat different than the short story. Both versions are very dark and from the viewpoint of some rather unsavory characters. I guess the story was influenced by some newspaper accounts and the desire to write something with a simple setting, little movement or action, and yet tap an uncomfortable nerve. I think it belies all the hubbub about "quiet horror" versus "graphic horror". It's not exactly either. It seems to be one of several of my stories that has caused some controversy, most of it from dumbasses who think if you write about a thing, that the characters in the story are thus viewed by you as sympathetic -- and, I suppose in one sense all humans are sympathetic, but that's a complicated barrel of worms that we'll avoid opening this time out -- and therefore represent you and your beliefs.

Before I leave you to it, I'll admit I think the short story version (NIGHT VISIONS 8) is considerably grimmer, due to a couple of scenes not contained in the play; they wouldn't have worked for the stage. But there are some variations in the play that I like better than the story, so what you have here is a different angle of attack that I hope you'll find interesting. Personally, I find the story more disturbing than anything I've written to date. As to why a play, I was commissioned to write two plays for an Off Broadway Theater production, that as of this writing is postponed, and perhaps cancelled. One of the money folks pulled out on the seeing of the content of the plays -- several one acts by a number of writers, F. Paul Wilson, Nancy Collins, Neal Barrett, and Del Close among them -- and the needed funds are now trying to be raised. I hope they manage to do just that. What an interesting and disturbing night of theater those plays would make.

— Joe R. Lansdale

CHARACTERS: Merle and Dave and a Woman's Right Leg, complete with Belled Ankle Bracelet
PLACE: A Drive-in Theater somewhere in Texas
TIME: Now

SCENE ONE

Lights go up on two men in the front seat of a car. A rear view mirror hangs down and from it dangles a little, stuffed, silver armadillo. Our duo is dressed in Western clothes, have on cowboy hats. They're in their forties, average looking. Dave is on the driver's side. Merle on the passenger's. There's a speaker in the driver's window and a wire goes from the speaker to a metal pole beside the car. On the seat between them are two tubs of popcorn, couple boxes of chocolate almonds, and two tall wax paper cups of Coke. It's night, of course, but it's fairly bright because the movie hasn't started yet and the lot lights are on.

DAVE: I like to be close so it all looks bigger than life. You don't mind, do you?

MERLE: (PAUSE) You ask me that every time. You don't never ask me that when we're driving in, you ask when we're parked.

DAVE: Don't like it, we can move.

MERLE: (SLIGHTLY EXASPERATED) I like it. I'm just saying, you don't really care if I like it. You just ask. When you ask me what I like, you could mean it.

DAVE: You're a testy motherfucker tonight. I thought coming to see a monster picture would cheer you up.

MERLE: You're the one likes 'em, and that's why you come. It wasn't for me, so don't talk like it was. I don't believe in monsters, so I can't enjoy what I'm seeing. I like something that's real. Cop movie. Things like that.

DAVE: I tell you, Merle, there's just no satisfying you, man. You'll feel better when they cut the lights and the movie starts. We can get our date then.

MERLE: I don't know that makes me feel better.

DAVE: You done quit liking pussy?

MERLE: Watch your mouth. I didn't say that. You know I like pussy. I like pussy fine.

DAVE: Whoa. Aren't we fussy? Way you talk, you're trying to convince me. Maybe it's buttholes you like.

MERLE: Goddammit, don't start on the buttholes. (DAVE LAUGHS, PLUCKS A PACK OF CIGARETTES FROM HIS POCKET, SHAKES ONE OUT AND LIPS IT.)

DAVE: I know you did that one ole gal in the butt that night. (REACHES UP, TAPS THE REARVIEW MIRROR). I seen you in the mirror here.

MERLE: You didn't see nothing.

DAVE: (GRINNING AROUND HIS CIGARETTE) I seen you get in her butthole. I seen that much.

MERLE: What the hell you doing watching? It ain't good enough for you by yourself, so you got to watch someone else get theirs? (DAVE SNICKERS, POPS HIS LIGHTER, AND FIRES UP HIS SMOKE)

DAVE: (SMIRKY) I don't mind watching.

MERLE: Yeah, well, I bet you don't. You're like one of those fucking perverts. (DAVE ISN'T BOTHERED BY THIS AT ALL. IN FACT, HE'S BECOME A BIT DISTRACTED. THE LOT LIGHTS GO OUT. A SILVERISH GLOW FILLS THE CAR, FLICKERS OVER OUR PAIR. TINNY MUSIC FROM THE SPEAKER. A VOICE: "HOWDY PARTNERS, TRUCK ON DOWN TO THE SNACKBAR . . .")

DAVE: (CUTTING THE SOUND OFF THE SPEAKER.) Heard all that shit I want . . . I'll turn it up when the movie starts. Won't be long now. (SLAPS AT HIS NECK.) Goddamn skeeters. Man, that cocksucker was big enough to straddle a turkey flat-footed.

MERLE: Maybe we could just forget it tonight.

DAVE: Listen, you don't like this first feature, the other'n's some kind of mystery. It might be like a cop show.

MERLE: I don't mean the movies.

DAVE: (SLIGHT CONCERN) You saying you ain't up to the girl?

MERLE: I'm saying I'm in a funny mood. (DAVE THUMPS HIS CIGARETTE OUT THE WINDOW.)

DAVE: (TRULY CONCERNED) Merle, this is kind of a touchy subject, but we're friends, so I'm gonna ask it. You been having trouble getting a bone to keep?

MERLE: (ALMOST ANGRY) What!

DAVE: It happens. I had it happen to me. (HOLDS UP A FINGER) Once.

MERLE: I'm not having trouble with my dick, okay?

DAVE: You are, it's no disgrace. It'll happen to a man from time to time.

MERLE: (ANGRY) My tool is all right. It works. No problem. It's just a mood or something. Feel like I'm going through one of them mid-life crisis or some kind of thing.

DAVE: (REASSURING) Mood hell. Let me tell you, when she's stretched out on that back seat, you'll be all right, crisis or no crisis. What you need, Merle, is to lighten up. Lay a little pipe. You don't ever lighten up. Don't we deserve some fun after working like niggers all day?

MERLE: You got to use that nigger stuff? It makes you sound ignorant . . . Well, he's colored and I like him. A man like that don't deserve to be called nigger.

DAVE: He's all right at the plant, but you go by his house and ask for a loan.

MERLE: I don't want to borrow nothing from him. I'm just saying people ought to get their due, no matter what color they are. Nigger is an ugly word.

DAVE: Hell, you like niggers so much, next date we set up, we'll make it a nigger. Shit, I'd fuck a nigger. All pink on the inside, ain't it?

MERLE: You're a bigot is what you are.

DAVE: That means I don't want to buddy up with no coons, then you're right . . . But let's drop the niggers. We ain't never gonna see eye to eye on that one . . . Thing is, Merle, you do have to learn to lighten up. You don't you'll die. That's what's wrong with you. You're tense. Listen here: I got an uncle, and he couldn't never lighten up. Gave him a spastic colon, all that tension. He swelled up until he couldn't wear his pants. Sumbitch had to get some of them stretch pants, one of them running suits, just so he could have on clothes. He eventually got so bad they had to go in and operate. You can bet he wishes now he didn't do all that worrying. He didn't get a better life on account of that worrying. He didn't get a better life on account of that worry, now did he? Still lives over in that little shit-hole apartment where he's been living, on account of he got so sick from worry he couldn't work. They're about to throw him out of there, and him a grown man and sixty years old. Lost his job, his wife, and now he's doing little odd shit here and there to make ends meet. Going down to catch the day truck with the winos and the niggers -- pardon me -- the Afro Americans . . . Before he got to worry over nothing, he had him some serious savings and was about ready to put some money down on a couple of acres and good double wide, one of them finer mobile homes.

MERLE: Shit. I was planning on buying me a double-wide, that'd make me worry. Them old trailers ain't worth a shit. Comes a tornado, or just a good wind, and you can find those fuckers at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico next to the regular trailers. Tornado will take a double-wide easy as any of the others.

DAVE: You go from one thing to another. I know what a tornado can do. It can take a house too. Your house. I'm not talking about mobile homes here, Merle. I'm talking about living. It's a thing you

better amend to. You're goddamn forty years old. Your life's half over . . . I know that's cold to say, but there you have it. It's out of my mouth. I'm forty this next birthday, so I'm not just putting the doom on you. It's a thing a man's got to face. Before I die, I'd like to think I did something with my life. Hear what I'm saying, Merle?

MERLE: Hard not to, being in the same car with you.

DAVE: (CONCILIATORY TONE) Hey, I'm getting kind of horny thinking about her. You see the legs on that bitch?

MERLE: Course I seen 'em . . . You don't know from legs. A woman's got legs is all you care, and you might not care about that. Couple of stumps would be all the same to you.

DAVE: No, I don't care for any stumps. Got to be feet on one end, pussy on the other. That's legs enough. But this one, she's got some good ones. Hell, you're bound to've noticed how good they were.

MERLE: I noticed. You saying I'm queer or something? I noticed. I noticed she's got an ankle bracelet on the right leg and she wears about a size ten shoe. Biggest goddamn feet I've ever seen on a woman. I never did care for a woman with big feet. You got a good looking woman all over and you get down to them feet and they look like something goes on either side of a sea plane . . . Well, it ruins things.

DAVE: She ain't ruined. Way she looks, big feet or not, she ain't ruined. Besides, you don't fuck the feet . . . Well, maybe you do. Right after the butthole.

MERLE: You gonna push one time too much, Dave. One time too much

DAVE: (GRINNING) Come on, I'm jacking with you. Take it easy. Look here, you haul your ashes first. That'll take some edge off.

MERLE: (SLOW TO ANSWER, BUT THE IDEA IS BEGINNING TO APPEAL TO HIM.) Well . . .

DAVE: (MAGNANIMOUS) Naw, go one. It's dark enough. Nobody can see.

MERLE: All right . . . But, one thing . . .

DAVE: What?

MERLE: Don't do me no more butthole talk, okay? One friend to another, no more.

DAVE: Bothers you that bad, okay. Deal (MERLE TURNS AND LEANS OVER THE BACKSEAT AND SNATCHES UP A BLANKET AND PULLS IT INTO THE FRONT SEAT. DAVE IS LOOKING INTO THE BACKSEAT, GRINNING. MERLE CLIMBS INTO THE BACKSEAT. HE'S ON HIS KNEES. HIS HANDS ARE OUT OF SIGHT, BUT IT'S OBVIOUS HE'S STRUGGLING SLIGHTLY. AFTER A MOMENT, HE COMES UP WITH A WOMAN'S SHORT DRESS AND TOSSES IT INTO THE FRONT SEAT. THIS IS FOLLOWED BY BIKINI PANTIES.)

(DAVE PICKS UP THE PANTIES, PUTS THEM OVER HIS NOSE, SNIFFS, DRAPES THEM ON THE GEAR SHIFT.)

(MERLE LIFTS A WOMAN'S LIMP, CHALK WHITE LEG INTO VIEW AND HOOKS THE ANKLE ON THE SEAT. AROUND THE ANKLE IS A LITTLE BRACELET WITH TWO MINIATURE GOLD BELLS. THEY TINKLE SLIGHTLY AS THE FOOT FALLS INTO PLACE.)

MERLE: Look at that foot. Foot like that ought to have a paper bag over it.

DAVE: Like I said, it ain't the feet I fuck. (MERLE UNFASTENS HIS BELT AND PANTS, STARTS TUGGING THEM DOWN. HE LOWERS HIMSELF INTO POSITION--)

MERLE: (OUT OF SIGHT) She's already starting to stink.

DAVE: (LOOKING BACK INTO THE BACKSEAT) You can't get pleased, can you?

She ain't stinking. She ain't been dead long enough to stink, and you know it. Quit being so goddamn contrary.

(DAVE SHAKES HIS HEAD, LIGHTS UP A CIGARETTE AND BLOWS SMOKE OUT THE WINDOW. HE ROAMS AN EYE TO THE REAR VIEW MIRROR, REACHES UP CASUALLY AND ADJUSTS IT. HE GRINS, PUFFS AT HIS CIGARETTE.)

MERLE: (STILL OUT OF SIGHT) And don't be looking back here at me neither!

(DAVE'S GRIN DEPARTS. HE SWITCHES UP THE SPEAKER. THE MOVIE IS STARTING. WE HEAR EERIE HORROR MOVIE MUSIC. HE TURNS HIS ATTENTION FORWARD TO WATCH THE "SCREEN". HE CASUALLY PLACES HIS CIGARETTE BETWEEN THE DEAD WOMAN'S TOES. HE REACHES OVER AND TAKES A BUCKET OF POPCORN AND PUTS IT IN HIS LAP AND STARTS TO DIG IN).

(CAR SHAKES. THE WOMAN'S FOOT VIBRATES ON THE BACK OF THE SEAT.)

(AS THE LIGHTS FADE, WE CAN HEAR THE LITTLE GOLDEN BELLS ON HER ANKLE BRACELET STARTING TO RING. AND IN THE DARKNESS THEY RING, AND RING . . . AND GRADUALLY FADE AWAY).

SCENE TWO

(MERLE IS BACK IN THE FRONT SEAT. DAVE IS STILL BEHIND THE STEERING WHEEL. THE WOMAN'S FOOT REMAINS VISIBLE. THE TOES HAVE THREE CIGARETTE BUTTS BETWEEN THEM AND THEY ARE BLACKENED FROM HAVING BEEN BURNED. IF THIS IS VISIBLE TO ONLY A SMALL PORTION OF THE AUDIENCE, GOOD ENOUGH. WE CAN HEAR SCREAMING AND THE GROWL OF A MONSTER FROM

THE SPEAKER. MERLE'S BELT IS UNFASTENED AND HE REACHES TO FASTEN IT. HE LOOKS SULLEN).

DAVE: How was it?

MERLE: It was pussy . . . Hey, turn that shit off.

DAVE: What you want me to do, read lips?

MERLE: Bad enough I got to watch this shit without hearing all that noise with it . . . Hell, you're gonna take a turn anyway. What do you care what you miss?

DAVE: (HE TURNS THE SPEAKER TO SILENCE) Yeah, well, all right. But this ain't half bad. You don't get too good a look at the monster though . . . That all the pussy you gonna get?

MERLE: Maybe some later.

DAVE: Feeling any better?

MERLE: Some. I think maybe we had a hole cut in the backseat back there, it'd be good as I just got.

DAVE: Bullshit. You're just down, man . . . Want a cigarette? You like a cigarette after sex, don't you?

MERLE: All right.
(DAVE GIVES MERLE A COFFIN NAIL, LIGHTS IT WITH A LIGHTER. MERLE SUCKS SMOKE IN DEEPLY.)

DAVE: Better?

MERLE: Yeah, I guess.

DAVE: Good. I'm gonna take a turn now.
(DAVE CLIMBS OVER THE SEAT).

MERLE: (STARING AT THE SCREEN AS IF INFINITELY BORED. SPEAKS WITHOUT LOOKING AT DAVE.) Got to be more to life than this?

DAVE: (ON HIS KNEES IN THE BACKSEAT, UNFASTENING HIS PANTS.) I been telling you, this is life, and you better start enjoying. Get you some orientation before it's too late and it's all over but the

dirt in the face . . . (HE MAKES A SLIGHT ADJUSTMENT IN THE POSITION OF THE WOMAN'S FOOT.) Talk to me later. Right now this is what I want out of life. Little later, I might want something else.

(DAVE LOWERS HIMSELF INTO THE BACKSEAT. BEAT. THE FOOT BEGINS TO SHAKE, THE BELL STARTS TO RING. GRUNTING SOUNDS FROM DAVE).

MERLE: (LOOKS AT THE VIBRATING FOOT, LOCKS HIS GAZE ON IT. AN UNPLEASANT EXPRESSION CROSSES HIS FACE.) Bet that damn foot's more a size eleven than a ten. Bitch probably bought shoes at the ski shop.

DAVE: Hey. I'm doing some business here. Do you mind?
(DAVE LOWERS HIMSELF OUT OF SIGHT. THE FOOT STARTS TO MOVE AGAIN. CAR ROCKS. THE BELLS RING. LIGHTS FADE, AND IN THE DARKNESS WE HEAR--)

DAVE: Give it to me, baby. (LOUDER) Give it to me! (LOUDER YET. VERY EXCITED. ALMOST BREATHLESS.) Am I your Prince, baby? Am I your goddamn King? Take that anaconda, bitch. Take it!

MERLE: For heaven's sake!

SCENE THREE

(DAVE CLIMBS INTO THE FRONT SEAT, GETS POSITIONED.)

DAVE: (SMILING. SATISFIED). Good piece. (HE USES HIS FINGER TO THUMP THE BELLS ON THE WOMAN'S ANKLE BRACELET). Damn good piece.

MERLE: You act like she had something to do with it.

DAVE: Her pussy, ain't it?

MERLE: We're doing all the work. Like I said, we could cut a hole in the seat back there and get it that good.

DAVE: That ain't true. It ain't the hole does it, and it damn sure ain't the personality, it's how they look. That flesh under you. Young. Firm. Try coming in an ugly or fat woman and you'll see what I mean. You'll have some troubles. Or maybe you won't.

MERLE: (DEFENSIVE) I don't like 'em old or fat.

DAVE: Yeah, well, I don't see the live ones like either one of us all that much. The old ones or the fat ones. Face it, we've got no way with live woman. And I don't like the courting. I like to know I see one I like, I can have her if I can catch her.

MERLE: I was thinking we ought to take them alive.

DAVE: (LIGHTING A CIGARETTE). We been over this. We take one alive, she might scream or get away. We could get caught easy enough.

MERLE: We could kill her when we're finished. Way we're doing, we could buy one of those blow up dolls, put it in the glove box and bring it to the drive-in.

DAVE: I've never cottoned to something like that. Even jacking off bothers me. A man ought to have a woman.

MERLE: A dead woman?

DAVE: Best kind. She's quiet. You haven't got to put up with clothes and makeup jabber, keeping up with the Jones' jabber, getting that promotion jabber. She's not gonna tell you "no" in the middle of the night. Ain't gonna complain about how you put it to her. One stroke's as good as the next to a dead bitch.

MERLE: I kind of like hearing 'em grunt, though. I like being kissed.

DAVE: Rape some girl, think she'll want to kiss you?

MERLE: I can make her.

DAVE: Dead's better. You don't have to worry yourself about how happy she is. You don't pay for nothing. You got a live woman, one you're married to even, you're still paying for pussy. If you don't pay in money, you'll pay in pain. They'll smile and coo for a time, but stay out late with the boys, have a little financial stress, they all revert to just what mama was. A bitch. She drove daddy into an early grave, way she nagged, and the old sow lived to be ninety. No wonder women live longer than men. They worry men to death . . . Hell, that was his wife put it on him. Wanting this and wanting that. When he got sick, had that operation and had to dip into his savings, she was out of there. They'd been married thirty years, but things got tough, you could see what those thirty years meant. He didn't even come out of that deal with a place to put his dick at night.

MERLE: All women ain't that way.

DAVE: Yeah they are. They can't help it. I'm not blaming them, it's in them, like germs. In time, they all turn out just the same.

MERLE: I'm talking about raping them, though, not marrying them. Getting kissed.

DAVE: You're with the kissing again. You been reading *Cosmo* or something? What's this kiss stuff? You get hungry, you eat. You get thirsty, you drink. You get tired, you sleep. You get horny, you kill and fuck. You use them like a product, Merle, then when you get through with the product, you throw out the package. Get a new one when you need it. This way you always got the young ones, the tan ones, no matter how old or fat or ugly you get. You don't have to see a pretty woman get old, see that tan turn her face to leather. You can keep the world bright and fresh all the time. You listen to me, Merle. It's the best way.

MERLE: Guess I'm just looking for a little romance. I had me a taste of it, you know. It was all right. She could really kiss.

DAVE: Yeah, it was all right for a while, then she ran off with some fella, and I bet some other swinging dick's come along since then and she's run off with him, and she'll keep running off until she's too old and ugly to hook some man other than the one she's got last, and she'll worry that poor sonofabitch to death.
(DAVE LOOKS AT MERLE, SEES HIS COMMENTS ARE PAINFUL TO HIS FRIEND).

DAVE: (SWEETLY) Don't think I don't understand what you're saying. Thing I like about you, Merle, is you aren't like those guys down at the plant, come in, do your job, go home, watch a little TV, fall asleep in the chair dreaming about some magazine model cause the old lay won't give out, or you don't want to think about her giving out on account of the way she's got ugly. Thing is, Merle, you know you're dissatisfied. That's the first step to knowing there's more to life than the old grind. I appreciate that in you. It's a kind of sensitivity some men don't like to face. Think it makes them weak. It's a strength, is what it is, Merle. Something I wish I had more of.

MERLE: (TOUCHED) That's damn nice of you to say, Dave.

DAVE: It's true. Anybody knows you, knows you feel things deeply. And I don't want you to think I don't appreciate romance, but you get our age, you got to look at things a little straighter. I can't see any romance with an old woman anyway, and a young one, she ain't gonna have me . . . Unless it's the way we're doing it now.

MERLE: (CONSIDERING) Yeah . . . I guess you're right.

DAVE: (THROWS A NOD AT THE BACK SEAT). Hey, she wasn't really so bad, was she? I picked all right, didn't I?

MERLE: (TRYING TO BE PLEASANT). 'Cept for them slats she has, she was fine.

DAVE: Good enough. (NOW HIS VOICE GOES FLAT). Well, let's take the bitch to the dump sight and throw her out . . . Time they find her, the worms will have

had some pussy too.

MERLE: You're a good friend, Dave. I ain't much for talking sentiment, but I want you to know that . . . The talk and all, it done me good. Really.

DAVE: (SMILING) Hey, it's all right. Been seeing this coming in you for a time, since the girl before last . . . You're all right now, though. Right?

MERLE: Well, I'm better.

DAVE: That's how you start.

MERLE: But I got to admit, I still miss being kissed.

DAVE: (LAUGHING) You and the kiss. You're some piece of work, buddy . . . I got your kiss. Kiss my ass.

MERLE: (GRINNING) Way I feel, your ass could kiss back, I just might.

DAVE: (LAUGH) I bet you would. Tell you what. Let's let this movie go to hell, dump the bitch, go on over to the house and watch a little *Dirty Harry*. I got it on tape.

MERLE: Deal.
(MERLE REACHES OVER AND SLAPS THE WOMAN'S FOOT OFF THE BACK OF THE SEAT. SHORT FURY OF BELLS. A THUD. DAVE REACHES TO START THE ENGINE AND THE LIGHTS GO OUT AND WE HEAR THE MOTOR IN THE DARKNESS, ALMOST GROWLING LIKE AN ANIMAL, MOVING AWAY IN THE DISTANCE, AND THEN THERE IS SILENCE AND--)

CURTAIN

-- CD



ED
GORMAN

GORMANIA

John O'Hara once remarked that he found writing about real people impossible. His creations never seemed as vivid as the people he based them on.

I find myself similarly inhibited, which is why most of my characters are either composites or wholly made up.

So here I sit with an assignment from Rich Chizmar to write about Joe Lansdale.

Let us begin with some objective facts: Joe Lansdale is in his early forties, speaks with the soft sly wisdom of most intelligent Texans, writes with a literary voice all his own, and is married to a woman blessed doubly with good looks and high humor, Karen by name.

I met Joe when we were both clients of the late agent Ray Peekner. I had just published my first or second novel. Joe had, I think, published three novels and dozens of short stories as well. During our first conversation, he described to me the story of *The Magic Wagon*, which was then on Pat LoBrutto's desk at Doubleday, and I had the good sense to be jealous.

This was on a sunny April morning five or so years ago and since then we've each learned considerable about the craft and business of writing, though it is the latter that takes up so much of our more recent conversations. We've both gone full-time in the last few years, and nothing fixes the mind quite like the perils of publishing.

Unfortunately, none of this tells you a damn thing about Joe himself, his humor, his generosity, his very basic goodness.

I got to know him especially well during the long and sad death of Ray Peekner. Ray and I had disagreed about a novel of mine and so I'd changed agents. The parting was rather like a divorce, painful to the point of sleepless nights and long brooding. Two months after I found a new agent, a woman I know called and said, "Do you know that Ray's sick?"

"Sick? Hell, he had a bad cold the last time I talked to him."

"I heard it's worse."

"Worse in what way?"

"I'm not sure but it's worse than a cold."

Joe called that night. I recall the first of our conversation verbatim: I said, "Somebody told me Ray's sick." And Joe, after a terrible silence, tears unmistakable in his voice, said in the saddest tone I've ever heard: "He's dying, Ed. From lung cancer."

There is a hard male sweetness in Joe that is both tougher and tenderer than macho could ever be. You hear it when he talks about his father, or Ray, or his sad ending with a blown-out alcoholic western writer we both know. And you hear it in the pride he takes in Karen and his two children (Joe was a pioneer house-husband, don't forget). He's in the best sense a man and in the best sense a Southern man. My wife, no pushover, finds him quite charming.

The work, of course, speaks for itself. Story interests me more than plot and so Joe is my sort of writer. I like the grace notes in his stories, the little human asides and details that give even the most macabre of his moments point and truth. Of all his books, I suppose I most like *The Magic Wagon* and *Savage Season* because each, in its own way, says something curiously positive about even the most wretched among us. I find Joe, in his own unpretentious way, quite religious. The Pope wouldn't understand him nor would Jimmy Swaggart but St. Francis might and so, certainly, would Graham Greene.

The great years are still ahead for Joe. His books will be even better, his popularity will multiply.

But I believe he will stay the same -- just as our friend Dean Koontz has -- because there is a moral center to Joe, man and writer alike, and nothing thank God can change that.

Ten years from now, after having just closed a movie deal, Joe will say, "Just a minute, Ed, I've got to settle those kids down a little. Be right back."

Thanks for a whole lot of things, my friend.

BESTSELLERS GUARANTEED

JOE R. LANSDALE

For Anibal Martinez

Larry had a headache, as he often did. It was those all night stints at the typewriter, along with his job and his boss, Fraggerty, yelling for him to fry the burgers faster, to dole them out lickity-split on mustard-covered sesame seed buns.

Burgers and fries, typing paper and typewriter ribbons -- the ribbons as grey and faded as the thirty-six years of his life. There really didn't seem to be any reason to keep on living. Another twenty to thirty years of this would be foolish. Then again, that seemed the only alternative. He was too cowardly to take his own life.

Washing his face in the bathroom sink, Larry jerked a rough paper towel from the rack and dried off, looking at himself in the mirror. He was starting to look like all those hacks of writer mythology. The little guys who turned out the drek copy. The ones with the blue-veined, alcohol noses and the eyes like volcanic eruptions.

"My God," he thought. "I look forty easy. Maybe even forty-five."

"You gonna stay in the can all day?" a voice yelled through the door. It was Fraggerty, waiting to send him back to the grill and the burgers. The guy treated him like a bum.

A sly smile formed on Larry's face as he thought: "I am a bum. I've been through three marriages, sixteen jobs, eight typewriters, and all I've got to show for it are a dozen articles, all of them in obscure magazines that either paid in copies or pennies." He wasn't even as good as the hack he looked like. The hack could at least point to a substantial body of work, drek or not.

And I've been at this . . . God, twelve years! An article a year. Some average. Not even enough to pay back his typing supplies.

He thought of his friend Mooney -- or James T. Mooney, as he was known to his fans. Yearly, he wrote a bestseller. It was a bestseller before it hit the stands. And except for Mooney's first novel, *The Goodbye Reel*, a detective thriller, all of them had been dismal. In fact, dismal was too kind a word. But the public lapped them up.

What had gone wrong with his own career? He used to help Mooney with his plots; in fact, he had helped him work out his problems on *The Goodbye Reel*, back when they had both been scrounging their livings and existing out of a suitcase. Then Mooney had moved to Houston, and a year later *The Goodbye Reel* had hit the stands like an atomic bomb. Made record sales in

hardback and paper, and gathered in a movie deal that boggled the imagination.

Being honest with himself, Larry felt certain that he could say he was a far better writer than Mooney. More commercial, even. So why had Mooney gathered the laurels while he bagged burgers and ended up in a dirty restroom contemplating the veins in his nose?

It was almost too much to bear. He would kill to have a bestseller. Just one. That's all he'd ask. Just one.

"Tear the damned crapper out of there and sit on it behind the grill!" Fraggerty called through the door. "But get out here. We got customers lined up down the block."

Larry doubted that, but he dried his hands, combed his hair and stepped outside.

Fraggerty was waiting for him. Fraggerty was a big fat man with bulldog jowls and perpetual blossoms of sweat beneath his meaty arms. Mid-summer, dead of winter -- he had them.

"Hey," Fraggerty said, "you work here or what?"

"Not any more," Larry said. "Pay me up."

"What?"

"You heard me, fat ass. Pay up!"

"Hey, don't get tough about it. All right. Glad to see you hike."

Five minutes later, Larry was leaving the burger joint, a fifty dollar check in his pocket.

He said aloud: "Job number seventeen."

The brainstorm had struck him right when he came out of the restroom. He'd go see Mooney. He and Mooney had been great friends once, before all that money and a new way of living had carried Mooney back and forth to Houston and numerous jet spots around the country and overseas.

Maybe Mooney could give him a connection, an *in*, as it was called in the business. Before, he'd been too proud to ask, but now he didn't give a damn if he had to crawl and lick boots. He had to sell his books; had to let the world know he existed.

Without letting the landlord know, as he owed considerable back rent, he cleaned out his apartment.

Like his life, there was little there. A typewriter, copies of his twelve articles, a few clothes and odds and ends. There weren't even any books. He'd had to sell them all to pay his rent three months back.

In less than twenty minutes, he snuck out without

being seen, loaded the typewriter and his two suitcases in the trunk of his battered Chevy, and looked up at the window of his dingy apartment. He lifted his middle finger in salute, climbed in the car and drove away.

Mooney was easy to find. His estate looked just the part for the residence of a bestselling author. A front lawn the size of a polo field, a fountain of marble out front, and a house that looked like a small English castle. All this near downtown Houston.

James T. Mooney looked the part, too. He answered the door in a maroon smoking jacket with matching pajamas. He had on a pair of glossy leather bedroom slippers that he could have worn with a suit and tie. His hair was well-groomed with just the right amount of grey at the temples. There was a bit of strained look about his eyes, but other than that he was the picture of health and prosperity.

"Well, I'll be," Mooney said. "Larry Melford. Come in."

The interior of the house made the outside look like a barn. There were paintings and sculptures and shelves of first edition books. On one wall, blown up to the size of movie posters and placed under glass and frame, were copies of the covers of his bestsellers. All twelve of them. A thirteenth glass and frame stood empty beside the others, waiting for the inevitable.

They chatted as they walked through the house, and Mooney said, "Let's drop off in the study. We can be comfortable there. I'll have the maid bring us some coffee or iced tea."

"I hope I'm not interrupting your writing," Larry said.

"No, not at all. I'm finished for the day. I usually just work a couple of hours a day."

"A couple hours a day?" thought Larry. A serpent of envy crawled around in the pit of his stomach. For the last twelve years, he had worked a job all day and had written away most of the night, generally gathering no more than two to three hours sleep a day. And here was Mooney writing these monstrous bestsellers and he only wrote a couple of hours in the mornings.

Mooney's study was about the size of Larry's abandoned apartment. And it looked a hell of a lot better. One side of the room was little more than a long desk covered with a word processor and a duplicating machine. The rest of the room was taken up by a leather couch and rows of bookshelves containing nothing but Mooney's work. Various editions of foreign publications, special collectors' editions, the leather-bound Christmas set, the paperbacks, the bound galley of all the novels. Mooney was surrounded by his success.

"Sit down; take the couch," Mooney said, hauling around his desk chair. "Coffee or tea? I'll have the maid bring it."

"No, I'm fine."

"Well then, tell me about yourself."

Larry opened his mouth to start, and that's when it fell out. He just couldn't control himself. It was as if a dam had burst open and all the water of the world was flowing away. The anguish, the misery, the years of failure found expression.

When he had finished telling it all, his eyes were glistening. He was both relieved and embarrassed. "So you see, Mooney, I'm just about over the edge. I'm craving success like an addict craves a fix. I'd kill for a bestseller."

Mooney's face seemed to go lopsided. "Watch that kind of talk."

"I mean it. I'm feeling so small right now, I'd have to look up to see a snake's belly. I'd lie, cheat, steal, kill -- anything to get published in a big way. I don't want to die and leave nothing of me behind."

"And you don't want to miss out on the good things either, right?"

"Damned right. You've got it."

"Look, Larry, worry less about the good things and just write your books. Ease up some, but do it your own way. You may never have a big bestseller, but you're a good writer, and eventually you'll crack and be able to make a decent living."

"Easy for you to say, Mooney."

"In time, with a little patience . . ."

"I'm running out of time and patience. I'm emotionally drained, whipped. What I need is an *in*. Mooney, an *in*. A name. Anything that can give me a break."

"Talent is the name of the game, Larry, not an *in*," Mooney said very softly.

"Don't give me that garbage. I've got talent and you know it. I used it to help you with the plots of your short stories. And your first novel -- remember the things I worked out for you there? I mean, come on, Mooney. You've read my writing. It's good. Damned good! I need help. And it can't hurt me. It may not help me much, but it's got to give me a damn sight better chance than I have now."

Larry looked at Mooney's face. Something seemed to be moving there behind the eyes and taut lips. He looked sad, and quite a bit older than his age. Well, okay. So he was offended by being asked right out to help a fellow writer. That was too bad. Larry just didn't have the pride and patience anymore to beat around the bush.

"An *in*, huh?" Mooney finally said.

"That's right."

"You sure you wouldn't rather do it your way?"

"I've been doing it my way for twelve years. I want a break, Mooney."

Mooney nodded solemnly. He went over to his desk and opened a drawer. He took out a small, white business card and brought it over to Larry.

It read:

BESTSELLERS GUARANTEED
Offices in New York, Texas, California
and
Overseas

The left hand corner of the card had a drawing of an open book, and the right hand corner had three phone numbers. One of them was a Houston number.

"I met a lady when I first moved here," Mooney said, "a big name author in the romance field. I sort of got this thing going with her ... finally asked her for ... an *in*. And she gave me this card. We don't see each other anymore, Larry. We stopped seeing each other the day she gave it to me."

Larry wasn't listening. "This an editor?"

"No."

"An agent?"

"No."

"Publisher, book packager?"

"None of those things and a little of all, and a lot more."

"I'm not sure . . ."

"You wanted your *in*, so there it is. You just call that number. And Larry, do me a favor. Never come here again."

The first thing Larry did when he left Mooney's was find a telephone booth. He dialed the Houston number and a crisp female voice answered: "Bestsellers Guaranteed."

"Are you the one in charge?"

"No sir, just hold on and I'll put you through to someone who can help you."

Larry tapped his finger on the phone shelf till a smooth-as-well-water male voice said: "B.G. here. May I be of assistance?"

"Uh . . . yes, a friend of mine . . . a Mr. James T. Mooney--"

"Of course, Mr. Mooney."

"He suggested . . . he gave me a card. Well, I'm a writer. My name is Larry Melford. To be honest, I'm not exactly sure what Mooney had in mind for me. He just suggested I call you."

"All we need to know is that you were recommended by Mr. Mooney. Where are you now?"

Larry gave the address of the *Seven Eleven* phone booth.

"Why don't you wait there . . . oh, say . . . twenty minutes, and we'll send a car to pick you up? That suit you?"

"Sure, but . . ."

"I'll have an agent explain it to you when he gets there, okay?"

"Yes, yes, that's fine."

Larry hung up and stepped outside to lean on the hood of his car. By golly, he thought, that Mooney does have connections, and now after all these years, my thirteenth year of trying, maybe, just maybe, I'm going to get connected, too.

He lit a cigarette and watched the August heat waves bounce around the *Seven Eleven* lot, and twenty minutes later, a tan, six-door limousine pulled up next to his Chevy.

The man driving the limo wore a chauffeur's hat and outfit. He got out of the car and walked around to the tinted, far backseat window and tapped gently on the glass. The window slid down with a short whoosh. A man dressed in black with black hair, a black mustache and thick-rimmed black shades, looked out at Larry. He said, "Mr. Melford?"

"Yes," Larry said.

"Would you like to go around to the other side? Herman will open the door for you."

After Larry had slid onto the seat and Herman had closed the door behind him, his eyes were drawn to the plush interior of the car. Encased in the seat in front of them was a phone, a television set and a couple of panels that folded out. Larry felt certain one of them would be a small bar. Air-conditioning hummed softly. The car was nice enough and large enough to live in.

He looked across the seat at the man in black, who was extending his hand. They shook. The man in black said, "Just call me James, Mr. Melford."

"Fine. This is about . . . writing? Mooney said he could give me . . . a connection. I mean, I have work, plenty of it. Four novels, a couple of dozen short stories, a novella -- of course I know that length is a dog to sell, but . . ."

"None of that matters," James said.

"This is about writing?"

"This is about bestsellers, Mr. Melford. That is what you want, isn't it. To be a bestselling author?"

"More than anything."

"Then you're our man and we're your organization."

Herman eased in behind the wheel. James leaned forward over the seat and said firmly, "Drive us around." Leaning back, James touched a button on the door panel and a thick glass rose out of the seat in front of them and clicked into place in a groove in the roof.

"Now," James said, "shall we talk?"

As they drove, James explained. "I'm the agent assigned to you, and it's up to me to see if I can convince you to join our little gallery. But, if you should sign on with us, we expect you to remain loyal. You must consider that we offer a service that is unique, unlike any offered anywhere. We can guarantee that you'll hit the bestseller list once a year, every year, as long as you're with us.

"Actually, Mr. Melford, we're not a real old organi-

zation, and though I have a hard time remembering the exact year we were founded, it predated the Kennedy assassination by a year."

"That would be sixty-two," Larry said.

"Yes, yes, of course. I'm terrible at years. But it's only lately that we've come into our own. Consider the bad state of publishing right now, then consider the fact that our clients have each had a bestseller this year -- and they will next year, no matter how bad publishing may falter. Our clients may be the only ones with books, but each of their books will be a bestseller, and their success will, as it does every year, save the industry."

"You're a packager?"

"No. We don't actually read the books, Mr. Melford, we just make sure they're bestsellers. You can write a book about the Earth being invaded by giant tree toads from the moon, if you like, and we will guarantee it will be a bestseller."

"My God, you are connected."

"You wouldn't believe the connections we have."

"And what does your organization get out of this? How much of a percentage?"

"We don't take a dime."

"What?"

"Not a dime. For our help, for our guarantee that your books will be bestsellers, we ask only one thing. A favor. One favor a year."

"What's the favor?"

"We'll come to that in a moment. But before we do, let me make sure you understand what we have to offer. I mean, if you were successful -- and I mean no offense by this -- then you wouldn't be talking to me now. You need help. We can offer help. You're in your mid-thirties, correct? Yes, I thought so. Not really old, but a bit late to start a new career plan. People do it, but it's certainly no piece of cake, now, is it?"

Larry found that he was nodding in agreement.

"So," James continued, "what we want to do is give you success. We're talking money in the millions of dollars, Mr. Melford. Fame. Respect. Most anything you'd want would be at your command. Exotic foods and wines? A snap of the fingers. Books? Cars? Women? A snap of the fingers. Anything your heart desires and it's yours."

"But I have to make a small, initial investment, right?"

"Ah, suspicious by nature, are you?"

"Wouldn't you be? My God, you're offering me the world."

"So I am. But no . . . no investment. Picture this, Mr. Melford. You might get lucky and sell your work, might even have a bestseller. But the slots are getting smaller and smaller for new writers. And one reason for that is that our writers, our clients, are filling those slots, Mr. Melford. If it's between your book and one of my client's, and yours is ten times better written, our client

will still win out. Every time."

"What you're saying is, the fix is in?"

"A crude way of putting it, but rather accurate. Yes."

"What about talent, craftsmanship?"

"I wouldn't know about any of that. I sell success, not books."

"But it's the public that puts out the money for these books. They make or break an author. How can you know what they'll buy?"

"Our advertising system is the best in the world. We know how to reach the public and how to convince. We also use subliminals, Mr. Melford. We flash images on television programs, theater films; we hide them in the art of wine and cigarette ads. Little things below conscious perception, but images that lock tight to the subconscious mind. People who would not normally pick up a book will buy our bestsellers."

"Isn't that dishonest?"

"Who's to tell in this day and age what's right and wrong? It's relative, don't you think, Mr. Melford?"

Larry didn't say anything.

"Look. The public pictures writers as rich, all of them. They don't realize that the average full-time writer barely makes a living. Most of them are out there starving, and for what? Get on the winning side for a change, Mr. Melford. Otherwise spend the rest of your life living in roach motels and living off the crumbs tossed you by the publishing world. And believe me, Mr. Melford, if you fail to join up with us, crumbs are all you'll get. If you're lucky."

The limousine had returned to the *Seven Eleven* parking lot. They were parked next to Larry's car.

"I suppose," James said, "we've come to that point that the bullfighters call 'the moment of truth.' You sign on with us and you'll be on Easy Street for the rest of your life."

"But we haven't talked terms."

"No, we haven't. It's at this point that I must ask you to either accept or turn down our offer, Mr. Melford. Once I've outlined the terms, you must be in full agreement with us."

"Accept before I hear what this favor you've talked about is?"

"That's correct. Bestseller or Bohemian, Mr. Melford. Which is it? Tell me right now. My time is valuable."

Larry paused only a moment. "Very well. Count me in. In for a penny, in for a pound. What's the favor?"

"Each year, you assassinate someone for us."

Larry dove for the door handle, but it wouldn't open. It had been locked electronically. James grabbed him by the wrist and held him tightly, so tightly that Larry thought his bones would shatter.

"I wouldn't," James said. "After what I've told you, you step out of this car and they'll find you in a ditch this afternoon, obviously the victim of some hit and run driver."

"That's . . . that's murder."

"Yes, it is," James said. "Listen to me. You assassinate whomever we choose. We're not discriminating as far as sex, color, religion, or politics goes. Anyone who gets in our way dies. Simple as that. You see, Mr. Melford, we are a big organization. Our goal is world domination. You, and all our clients, are little helpers toward that goal. Who is more respected than a bestselling author? Who is allowed in places where others would not be allowed? Who is revered by public figures and the general public alike? An author -- a bestselling author."

"But . . . it's murder."

"There will be nothing personal in it. It'll just be your part of the contract. One assassination a year that we'll arrange."

"But, if you're so connected . . . why do this? Why not just hire a hit man?"

"In a sense, I have."

"I'm not an assassin. I've never even fired a gun."

"The amateur will be in many ways better than the professional. He doesn't fall into a pattern. When the time comes, we will show you what you have to do. If you decide to be with us, that is."

"And if not?"

"I told you a moment ago. The ditch. The hit and run driver."

Suddenly, Herman was standing at the door, his hand poised to open it.

"Which is it, Mr. Melford? I'm becoming impatient. A ditch or a bestseller? And if you have any ideas about going to the police, don't. We have friends there, and you might accidentally meet one. Now, your decision."

"I'm in," Larry said softly. "I'm in."

"Good," James said, taking Larry's hand. "Welcome aboard. You get one of those books of yours out, pick out a publisher, and mail it in. And don't bother with return postage. We'll take care of the rest. Congratulations."

James motioned to Herman. The door opened. Larry got out. And just before the door closed, James said, "If you should have trouble coming up with something, getting something finished, just let me know and we'll see that it gets written for you."

Larry stood on the sidewalk nodding dumbly. Herman returned to the driver's seat, and a moment later the tan limo from *Bestseller's Guaranteed* whispered away.

James was as good as his word. Larry mailed off one of his shopworn novels, a thriller entitled *Texas*

Backlash, and a contract for a half million dollars came back, almost by return mail.

Six months later, the book hit the bestseller list and rode there for a comfortable three months. It picked up a two million dollar paperback sale and a bigshot movie producer purchased it for twice that amount.

Larry now had a big mansion outside of Nacogdoches, Texas, with a maid, a cook, two secretaries and a professional yard man. Any type of food he wanted was his for the asking. Once he had special seafood flown in from the East Coast to Houston and hauled from there to his door by refrigerated truck.

Any first edition book he wanted was now within his price range. He owned four cars, two motorcycles, a private airplane and a yacht.

He could own anything -- even people. They hopped at his every word, his most casual suggestion. He had money and people wanted to satisfy those with money. Who knows maybe it would rub off on them.

And there were women. Beautiful women. There was even one he had grown to care for, and believed cared for him instead of his money and position. Lovely Luna Malone.

But in the midst of all this finery, there was the favor. The thought of it rested on the back of his mind like a waiting vulture. And when a year had gone by, the vulture swooped in.

On a hot August day, the tan limo from *Bestsellers Guaranteed* pulled up the long, scenic drive to Larry's mansion. A moment later, Larry and James were in Larry's study and Herman stood outside the closed door with his arms akimbo, doing what he did best. Waiting, silently.

James was dressed in black again. He still wore the thick-framed sun shades. "You know what I've come for, don't you?"

Larry nodded. "The favor."

"On March fifteenth, *Bestsellers Guaranteed* will arrange for an autograph party for your new bestseller, whatever that may be. At eleven-fifteen, you will excuse yourself to go upstairs to the men's room. Next door to it is a janitor's lounge. It hasn't been used in years. It's locked but we will provide you with the key.

"At the rear of the lounge is a restroom. Lift off the back of the commode and you will discover eight small packages taped to the inside. Open these and fit them together and you'll have a very sophisticated air rifle. One of the packages will contain a canister of ice, and in the middle, dyed red, you will find a bullet-shaped projectile of ice. The air gun can send that projectile through three inches of steel without the ice shattering.

"You will load the gun, go to the window, and at exactly eleven-twenty five, the Governor will drive by in an open car in the midst of a parade. A small hole has been cut in the window. It will exactly accommodate the barrel of the rifle and the scope will fit snugly against the

glass. You will take aim, and in a matter of seconds, your favor for this year will be done."

"Why the Governor?"

"That is our concern."

"I've never shot a rifle."

"We'll train you. You have until March. You won't need to know much more than how to put the rifle together and look through the scope. The weapon will do the rest."

"If I refuse?"

"The bestselling author of *Texas Backlash* will be found murdered in his home by a couple of burglars, and a couple of undesirables will be framed for the crime. Don't you think that has a nicer ring to it than the hit and run program I offered you before? Or perhaps, as a warning, we'll do something to your lady friend. What's her name . . . Luna?"

"You wouldn't!"

"If it would offer incentive or achieve our desired goals, Mr. Melford, we would do anything."

"You bastard!"

"That'll be quite enough, Mr. Melford. You've reaped the rewards of our services, and now we expect to be repaid. It seems a small thing to ask for success -- and certainly you wouldn't want to die at the hands of other bestselling authors, the ones who will ultimately be your assassins."

In spite of the air-conditioning, Larry had begun to sweat. "I know who are you guys, really?"

"I've told you. We're an organization with big plans. What we sponsor more than anything else, Mr. Melford, is moral corruption. We feed on those who thrive on greed and ego; put them in positions of power and influence. We belong to a group, to put it naively, who believe that once the silly concepts of morality and honor break down, then we, who really know how things work, can take control and make them work to our advantage. To put it even more simply, Mr. Melford. We will own it all."

"I . . . I can't just cold-bloodedly murder someone."

"Oh, I think you can. I've got faith in you. Look around you, Mr. Melford. Look at all you've got. Think of what you've got to lose, then tell me if you can murder from a distance someone you don't even know. I'll wait outside with Herman for your answer. You have two minutes."

From the March fifteenth edition of *The Austin Statesman*, a front page headline: GOVERNOR ASSASSINATED, ASSASSIN SOUGHT

From the same issue, page 4B: BESTSELLING AUTHOR, LARRY MELFORD, SIGNS BOOKS.

Six months later, in the master bedroom of Larry

Melford's estate, Larry was sitting nude in front of the dresser mirror, clipping unruly nose hairs. On the bed behind him, nude, dark, luscious, lay Luna Malone. There was a healthy glow of sweat on her body as she lay with two pillows propped under her head; her raven hair was like an explosion of ink against their whiteness.

"Larry," she said, "you know, I've been thinking . . . I mean there's something I've been wanting to tell you, but haven't said anything about it because . . . well, I was afraid you might get the wrong idea. But now that we've known each other a while, and things look solid . . . Larry, I'm a writer."

Larry quit clipping his nose hairs. He put the clipper on the dresser and turned very slowly. "You're what?"

"I mean, I want to be. And not just now, not just this minute. I've always wanted to be. I didn't tell you, because I was afraid you'd laugh, or worse, think I'd only got to know you so you could give me an *in*, but I've been writing for years and have sent book after book, story after story in, and just know I'm good, and well . . ."

"You want me to look at it?"

"Yeah, but more than that, Larry. I need an *in*. It's what I've always wanted. To write a bestseller. I'd kill for . . ."

"Get out! Get the hell out!"

"Larry, I didn't meet you for that reason . . ."

"Get the hell out or I'll throw you out."

"Larry . . ."

"Now!" He stood up from the chair, grabbed her dressing gown. "Just go. Leave everything. I'll have it sent to you. Get dressed and never let me see you again."

"Aren't you being a little silly about this? I mean . . ."

Larry moved as fast as an eagle swooping down on a field mouse. He grabbed her shoulder and jerked her off the bed onto the floor.

"All right, you bastard, all right." Luna stood. She grabbed the robe and slipped into it. "So I did meet you for an *in*; what's wrong with that? I bet you had some help along the way. It sure couldn't have been because you're a great writer. I can hardly force myself through that garbage you write."

He slapped her across the cheek so hard she fell back on the bed.

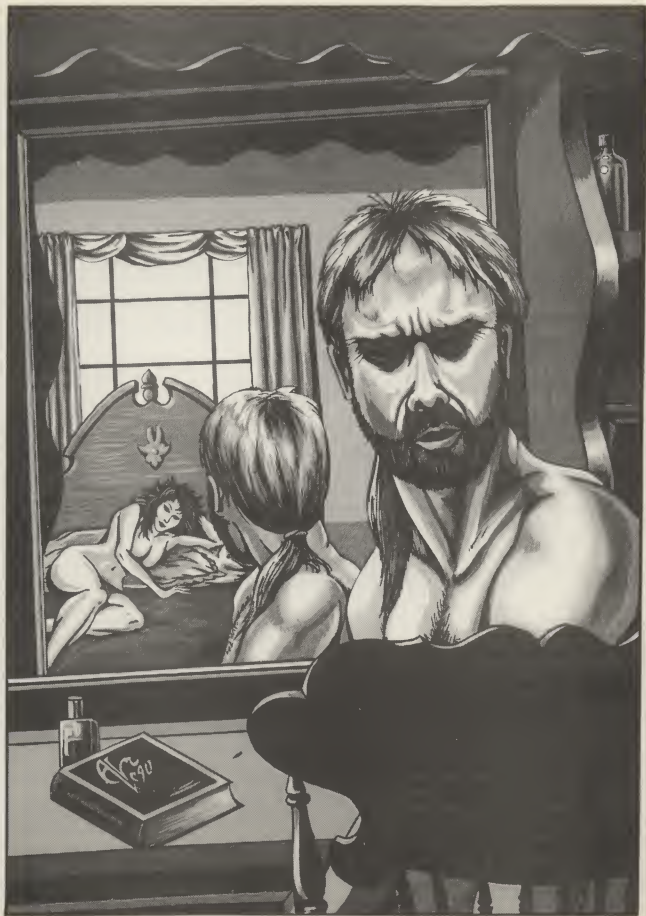
Holding her face, she got up, gathered her clothes and walked stiffly to the bathroom. Less than a minute later, she came out dressed, the robe over her shoulder.

"I'm sorry about hitting you," Larry said. "But I meant what I said about never wanting to see you again."

"You're crazy, man. You know that? Crazy. All I asked you for was an *in*, just . . ."

Luna stopped talking. Larry had lifted his head to look at her. His eyes looked as dark and flat as the twin barrels of a shotgun.

"Don't bother having Francis drive me home. I'll



call a cab from downstairs, Mr. Bigshot Writer."

She went out, slamming the bedroom door. Larry got up and turned off the light, went back to the dresser chair and sat in the darkness for a long time.

Nearly a year-and-a-half later, not long after completing a favor for *Bestsellers Guaranteed*, and acquiring a somewhat rabid taste for alcoholic beverages, Larry was in the Houston airport waiting to catch a plane for Hawaii for a long vacation, when he saw a woman in the distance who looked familiar. She turned and he recognized her immediately. It was Luna Malone. Still beautiful, a bit more worldly looking, and dressed to the hilt.

She saw him before he could dart away. She waved. He smiled. She came over and shook hands with him. "Larry, you aren't still mad, are you?"

"No, I'm not mad. Good to see you. You look great."

"Thanks."

"Where're you going?"

"Italy. Rome."

"Pope country," Larry said with a smile, but at his words, Luna jumped.

"Yes . . . Pope country."

The announcer called for the flight to Rome, Italy. Luna and Larry shook hands again and she went away.

Larry, to kill time, went to the airport bookstore. He found he couldn't even look at the big cardboard display with his latest bestseller in it. He didn't like to look at bestsellers by anyone. But something did catch his eye. It was the cardboard display next to his. The book was called *The Little Storm*, and appeared to be one of those steamy romance novels. But what had caught his

eyes was the big, emblazoned name of the author -- LUNA MALONE.

Larry felt like a python had uncoiled inside of him. He felt worse than he had ever felt in his life.

"Italy. Rome," she had said.

"Pope country," he had said, and she jumped.

Larry stumbled back against the rack of books, and his clumsiness knocked it over. The books tumbled to the floor. One of them slid between his legs and when he looked down he saw that it had been turned over to its back. There was his smiling face looking up at him. Larry Melford, big name author, bestseller, a man whose books found their way into the homes of millions of readers.

Suddenly, Hawaii was forgotten and Larry was running, running to the nearest pay phone. What had James said about moral corruption? "We feed on those who thrive on greed and ego . . . once silly concepts of morality and honor break down . . . we will own it all."

The nightmare had to end. *Bestsellers Guaranteed* had to be exposed. He would wash his hands with blood and moral corruption no more. He would turn himself in.

With trembling hand, he picked up the phone, put in his change, and dialed the police.

From today's *Houston Chronicle*, front page headline: POPE ASSASSINATED

From the same edition, the last page before the "Want Ads," the last paragraph: BESTSELLING AUTHOR MURDERED IN HOME. The story follows: "Police suspect the brutal murder of author Larry Melford occurred when he surprised burglars in the act. Thus far, police have been unable to . . ."

-- CD



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CD NEWS

THOMAS F. MONTELEONE LAUNCHES A NEW PRESS

Writer and anthology editor Tom Monteleone has started a new hardcover imprint called BORDERLANDS PRESS. It draws its name from Monteleone's innovative, cutting edge anthology series, *Borderlands*. The other officers in the new enterprise are businessmen Henry G. Curtis and James C. Dobbs.

Borderlands Press' first offerings will include signed, limited editions of *The Magic Wagon* by Joe R. Lansdale, *Gauntlet* (which will include a signed essay by Stephen King), *Borderlands II* edited by Monteleone, a series of Harlan Ellison titles which have never appeared in hardcover, and Peter Straub's next (as yet untitled) novel. Several one-shot anthologies are planned, plus more limited editions by popular authors. Unsolicited manuscripts are not being read at this time, even if represented by agents.

A division of Borderlands Press will offer a variety of typographic and publishing services at less-than-New York City rates. Magazine publishers take note: Book quality (1100 dpi) typesetting, page design, printing, scanning, and data conversion are all available.

BORDERLANDS PRESS: P.O. Box 32333, Baltimore, MD 21208

STRACZYNSKI RECEIVES ACE AWARD NOMINATION

J. Michael Straczynski, acknowledged as one of the busiest writers in Hollywood, was nominated for an Ace Award (the cable television industry's equivalent of an Emmy) for Best Writing in a Dramatic Series for "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," written for Showtime's NIGHTMARE CLASSICS. (The adaptation was also nominated for Best Dramatic Presentation.)

The nominations come on the heels of delivering the script for Warner Bros. new four-hour mini-series, V: THE NEXT CHAPTER, and a screenplay for Ivan Reitman, producer/director of TWINS and GHOST-BUSTERS. A special two-hour movie written by Straczynski for the JAKE AND THE FATMAN series debuted this winter on CBS.

In addition, demand for Straczynski's second novel for NAL/Penguin, *Otherside*, prompted follow-up hardcover printings, and the book sold to Japan, Italy, Germany, England, and three other countries. His third

novel, *It's Getting Dark*, will debut in hardcover next year.

CEMETERY DANCE BACK ISSUE SALE!!!

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CD#6 -- J.N. Williamson

"CHILL" from MAYFAIR GAMES INC.

Mayfair Games Inc. recently announced *Chill*, a role-playing board game for horror fans, a revised version of the award-winning Pacesetter game of the same name.

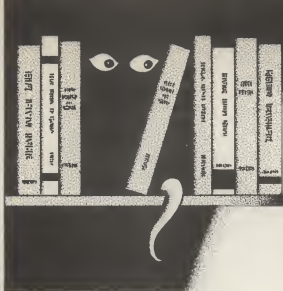
Mayfair Games Inc.
5641 Howard Street
P.O. Box 48539
Niles, IL 60648
(800)432-4376
FAX 708-647-0939

CORRECTIONS

The name of the mysterious drug in Brian Hodge's forthcoming Dell Abyss novel, *Nightlife*, is SKULL-FLUSH, not SKULLFISH, as it was accidentally printed in the last issue of *Cemetery Dance*. Our apologies to Mr. Hodge for the error.

Regarding T. Liam McDonald's use of the following quote in his *Profiles in Terror* column last issue (an interview with F. Paul Wilson): "Not bad at all for what David Schow would disparagingly call a busted sci-fi writer."

Mr. Schow brought it to our attention that this quote -- originally printed in *Pulphouse* -- never applied to F. Paul Wilson. The quote was used out of context by McDonald, and the blame for any misunderstanding which may arise is *Cemetery Dance's*. The magazine's staff and columnist T. Liam McDonald apologize to both Mr. Schow and Mr. Wilson for the error.



EDWARD BRYANT

BOOK REVIEWS

Joe R. Lansdale -- that's the answer. Joe Lansdale and Kathe Koja and Dan Simmons and Randall Boyll and a whole list of other writers who, when they deal in the horror field, bring an enjoyable, challenging, and fascinating freshness to tired old material that can rejuvenate an area reeling from short-sighted management and promiscuous marketing.

Even as some other mass market publishers are drawing in their horns, so to speak, in terms of their horror imprints, Dell is courageously launching a new monthly line of horror and dark fantasy novels called Abyss Books. Under the editorship of Jeanne Cavelos, Abyss has announced an initial lineup that includes new and established writers ranging from Ron Dee and Melanie Tem to Kelly Wilde and Michael McDowell. Preliminary indications are that the publisher will back each Abyss release with some healthy promotion. Cavelos' avowed goal is to present adventurous, literate horror that will push the envelope.

At its World Fantasy Convention launch party in Chicago, Abyss displayed gorgeously macabre eye-catching packages for its titles. The Abyss folks also gave away souvenir box-cutters labeled "the cutting edge in horror." If dispensing razor-bladed memorabilia with alcoholic beverages wasn't gutsy, I don't know what is.

The debut Abyss release is Kathe Koja's *The Cipher* (\$3.95, 356 pp), a first novel. Detroit area writer Koja has rapidly made a name for herself with distinctive magazine appearances. She's a protean prose crafter who glides with ease between gender viewpoints. Her fiction is both tough and tender, strong streaks of romance reined in by a hard-edged sensibility that rarely flinches. Even her edges have edges. High energy and sure control, she seems to have it all. A lot of us wondered what Koja could produce when she turned her considerable ambitions toward the novel form.

It's a stunner.

The Cipher is a tale of the undead that transcends every stereotype and cliché of the form. These hollow-eyed shamblers don't inhabit crypts or Gothic castles. Nope, they live just down the hall from you. They bore you at art openings as they scarf up the freebies from the dip table, and haunt the crowded aisles of your video stores. No supernatural vampires or zombies here. Just dead-end people in dead-end lives, some still desperately hoping for a goal, some modicum of meaning, anything.

The Cipher's central player is Nicholas Reid, failed poet and video store clerk. With his sometime lover Nakota (also known as Shrike or Jane, depending on when you knew her), Nicholas investigates a strange phe-

nomenon in a neglected storeroom of his apartment building. There is something that can best be described as a black hole. Things generally don't come back after they enter the hole; or, if they do, they are terribly changed. Nicholas and Nakota christen their find "the Funhole." Nakota experiments with putting a mouse into the Funhole. Then she rigs a camcorder and lowers it beyond the event horizon. She ends up with a very strange video recording that tends to elicit inexplicably varied reactions from whoever views it.

At one point, Nicholas accidentally falls and thrusts his arm into the Funhole. He gets his arm back but now there's a miniature Funhole in the palm of his hand. Like a poisonous spider bite eroding flesh, the hole in Nicholas' hand starts slowly to devour him, weeping yucky ectoplasmic fluids as it does so. Then Nakota realizes that Nicholas has an even stranger and more symbiotic relationship with the Funhole. Somehow he is a catalyst that allows the Funhole to manifest at all.

At first in a sort of Brownian motion, a small circle of wacked-out friends and devotees begins to accumulate around Nicholas. It would seem that purpose is developing in his life, but toward what goals? For what ends?

And who is going to die as Nicholas is progressively fragmented?

Koja tells her story with extraordinarily precise language, often lyrical, sometimes brutally direct. There is humor here, but it is designed to saw at your ribs until you wince. There is warmth -- which paradoxically freezes. The novel is filled with stylistic teeth -- and they all bite.

One of *The Cipher's* great achievements is creating a mounting sense of dread that builds nearly unbearably. Does the Funhole control Nicholas in some sick way? Or is the relationship rather more complex than that? And what is going to happen when Nicholas locks himself in the storeroom with the Funhole, even as a frustrated Nakota waits impatiently outside with a chainsaw?



I don't think Abyss could have picked a weirder, more accomplished novel to demonstrate by example what the tone and level of ambition of the new line might be. *The Cipher* is an adventurous work for similarly adventurous readers.

**

The fascinating thing about *Night Visions 8* (Dark Harvest,

\$20.95, 252 pp) is the voices.

No, I'm not cracking up. Auditory hallucinations? Uh uh. It just struck me that all three of this year's guest writers, each contributing about 30,000 words of new fiction to the volume, employ interestingly and effectively distinctive voices through which they tell their tales. When used well, that device pertains to writing in the manner that exquisitely utilized spices transform food from the ordinary to the wonderful.

The Night Visions series customarily includes a couple of heavy hitters who bracket a newer and lesser known author. This volume leads with John Farris, that Jekyll/Hyde of the mainstream (*Harrison High*) and suspense/horror (*The Fury*). Farris' voice here is that of the middle-class South, particularly Georgia. Regardless of what the stories themselves do or don't do, the author fares wonderfully well with the settings he establishes, and the voices through which he allows his characters to speak.

"Good Morning, Daddy" opens with a great narrative hook: "I was finishing my laps around the lake about seven o'clock when Doyle Kindor's youngest boy Ricky Gene shot me in the head with Doyle's old Colt Woodsman." This is a technically ambitious story in which Farris pulls off a very tricky balancing act with a completely unreliable narrator. Once I thought the story was predictable, I wondered how Farris would add an expected fillip. Suffice to say he does -- and with a nasty twist.

"Hairshirt" is a cautionary tale about guys who act like jerks -- and the woman who loves them. Too bad about teenager Mel McGivency, Jr. Things are going along pretty well with Vandy, his new girlfriend, until she discovers his little personality quirk of enjoying swerving out of his way to clip dogs and cats on the road. It's an effective "bitter bitten" morality play.

"More Than Mischief" is a slightly bawdy fantasy about storekeeper Tobias Frost and what hap-

pens when he accepts Poolie Mayhap's offer to stop the thievery that is bankrupting Tobias' business. There's something of a Manly Wade Wellman feel to the voice in this one.

The voice of British novelist Stephen Gallagher is a little cool and detached, perhaps a bit mid-Atlantic. His lead story, "The Back of His Hand" is a small masterpiece of black humor. Thief Billy desperately needs to have an elaborate identifying tattoo removed from the back of his hand. The inexorable quicksand he digs himself into is funny, but in a special way. It's like having your ribs tickled with a straight razor.

"Comparative Anatomy" is about the disintegration of a relationship as the participants find themselves shipping on a most strange and ghostly car ferry. The story is predictable but the mood works beautifully. "Dead Man's Handle" is an eerily spooky tale of supernatural revenge in an amusement park. "Hunter, Killer" is a story of infiltration and adventure that seems to exist especially for a weird joke at the end.

Night Visions 8 wraps with a quartet of stories by the redoubtable Joe R. Lansdale. As ever, Lansdale has his patented Texas blue-collar voice for his characters down perfectly. "Steppin' Out, Summer, '68" is a wonderful portrait of some hapless teenaged boys who just want to get laid one steamy night. What happens then is a complete lesson in entropy. Things Get Worse. The story's funny even when it makes you wince.

"Incident On and Off a Mountain Road" is rather less humorous. It's a tense stalk-and-chase melodrama about a woman who finds herself alone and battling a psychopathic killer. Trust Lansdale to find a final twist to lift the piece above the expectable. "The Phone Woman" is a profound change of tone; it's a quietly sinister study of a disturbed woman's influence on a nice family man who's just been waiting all his life for the right catalyst.

Then there's "Drive-in Date." This is one of Lansdale's tough ones,

a bit similar in tone to "Night They Missed the Horror Show," only less warm and funny, if you can believe it. In "Drive-in Date," Dave and Merle are a couple of wild and crazy guys who get off on murder and necrophilia. It helps cement their male bonding. The tone is bleak, the subject exceedingly nasty. I'm serious about the "less warm and funny" remark above. "Drive-in Date" is so unrelentingly grim, with not even a tonal respite, I think some of the potential punch is diminished.

Robert R. McCammon contributes an afterword called "The Judge," which scores points against censorship and other First Amendment sins.

All in all, *Night Visions 8* is an above-average addition to this fine series. Each of the included authors has at least one real killer of a story, and some have more. *Night Visions* continues to serve as a good barometer for the state of the art in dark fantasy.

..

The first thing you've got to say about Dean R. Koontz's latest bestselling novel, *Cold Fire* (Putnam, \$21.95, 384 pp), is, it's compulsive reading. I picked it up at supper, intending to read just a few pages, just to get a sample of where the book was going to go. When I reluctantly set the volume down, it was sixty pages later.

Cold Fire is another of Koontz's cross-genre thrillers. In this one, the author's done a good job of setting up one expectation after another for the reader, violating those expectations (without alienating the reader), then taking the plot in yet another unexpected direction. Mostly it all works just fine.

We first meet Jim Ironheart when a mysterious voice -- and one he must obey -- sends him on a bizarre mission from Orange County to Portland, Oregon. Jim has been dispatched as a sort of agent of des-

tiny -- to save a young Oregon boy from being struck and killed by a drunk driver at a predetermined time and location. For some unknown reason, it is essential that the boy's life be saved, even at the risk of Jim's own.

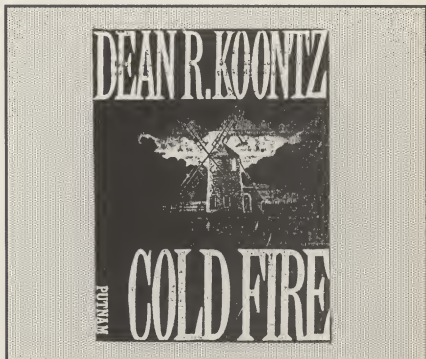
Jim effects his mission, but meets local reporter Holly Thorne. Holly, both curious about Jim's hero role and attracted by him, eventually tracks him down in Southern California. In the meantime, Jim has gone on another lifesaving mission, this time with a stolen Camaro and a pump shotgun to save a woman and her daughter from a pair of kiddie-porn producers and fulltime psychopaths.

the mysterious voice sends him on his way again.

But Holly sticks with her investigation. And things change. Is Jim really controlled by God? Or is there an extraterrestrial in the picture? Or is there someone else yet?

The author creates a pair of well-fleshed-out characters, particularly the young reporter. Koontz does a fine job of suggesting and then showing how an aggressive investigative reporter is perhaps not so different from a good shrink.

And the plot surprises just keep on coming. Though I think the author perhaps missed a beat by not allowing his characters to worry a little more realistically about some of



Holly uncovers more of Jim's background. Turns out he was an ordinary schoolteacher until one of his students committed suicide. Jim quit his job and started learning about martial arts, weaponry, and high-speed driving. And he began his career as a hero.

But who -- or what -- gives him his marching orders? It's almost as though Jim is an agent of God, or at least some god. Jim doesn't know. He can only speculate -- and obey as

the ramifications of the conclusion, *Cold Fire* is still a solid piece of entertainment.

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SHORT TAKES

Add *Best New Horror* (Carroll & Graf, \$18.95, 400 pp) to the must-buy list already inhabited by Terry Windling and Ellen Datlow's

Year's Best Fantasy and Horror (St. Martin's) and Karl Edward Wagner's idiosyncratic *The Year's Best Horror* (DAW). Editors Stephen Jones and Ramsey Campbell have amassed 20 stories reprinted from publications both large and small. The selection is eclectic, the level of interest generally high. Some of the many high points include Thomas Tessier's tale of political horror, "Blanca," Steve Rasnic Tem's quiet story of sexual terror, "Carnal House," and D.F. Lewis' time release capsule of concentrated eeriness, "Mort au Monde." This first-rate collection is very much a complement to its friendly competition, rather than a redundancy.

Rex Miller's new Jack Eichord novel *Iceman* (NAL Onyx, \$4.50, 288 pp) is neither the most startling nor the most gruesome in the series that includes *Slob* and *Slice*, but it still ably holds up its end of the writer/reader bargain. In this volume, troubled cop Jack's up against another bent psychopath, this one using an icepick. For me, much of the book's interest lies in following Jack's relationship with his wife Donna, and their adopted boy, the young son of Jack's now-dead nemesis, Chaingang Bunkowski. The moral and the physical issues implicit in Jack's self-chosen family responsibilities are actually more fascinating than the tracking down of yet another murderous crazy.

Neil Gaiman, Terry Pratchett's collaborator for *Bad Omens*, is one of the handful of comic book writers whose work possesses a complexity and interest level that can intrigue and satisfy dyed-in-the-wool prose chauvinists. Gaiman, creator of the marvelously textured *Sandman* series, is also writing a four-part graphic novel called *The Books of Magic* (DC, \$3.95, 50pp). The first volume has just appeared. The books concerns the initiation of a young boy with "powers" into the lore of real magic. Volume one is primarily backfill information, with very little action going on. It is a tribute to Gaiman's spare, effective prose, and

to John Bolton's absolutely gorgeous art (perhaps the best he's ever done) that the reader is sufficiently hooked to wait eagerly and impatiently for volume two.

L. Ron Hubbard's short novel *Fear* (Bridge, \$16.95, 188pp) has been reprinted in a spiffy hardback edition, and deservedly so. This is one of the classics of the field that I will remember from reading as teenager. It's a psychological horror novel that scared me back then, and still holds the power to disturb today, 50 years after its first publication. The story's about a college professor who has lost four hours out of his life, and what happens when he attempts to ferret out the truth of what happened. This is a masterful portrait of denial and emotional avoidance. While the prose occasionally sounds clunky to 1990's sensibilities, the novel still retains an enormous power to unsettle the reader. It's a triumph of content over style.

Midnight Mass (Axolotl/Pulphouse Publishing, \$10, 85pp) is F. Paul Wilson's novella about normal humans attempting to survive a world dominated by vampires. Originally intended for the HWA shared-world anthology *Under the Fang*, *Midnight Mass* will be appearing only in this present venue. It's the story of the friendship between a Jewish rabbi and a Catholic priest. Zev Wolpin is trying to help his old friend Joseph Cahill regain both his faith and his parish church which has fallen to the undead. The supernatural melodrama is competently drawn; but the real interest is in the interfaith friendship of two men reeling under horrendous stress.

It's unusual for a new writer with only two professional sales to warrant even a chapbook, but with *By Death Abused* (Roadkill Press, Little Bookshop of Horrors, 10380 Ralston Road, Arvada, CO 80004, \$2.95, 13 pp) by Gary Jonas, the risk seems warranted. Roadkill Press is a new imprint being launched by sf/fantasy/horror shop Little Bookshop of Horrors, who are also publishing

chapbooks by such authors as Dan Simmons and Steve Rasnic Tem. The production is exemplary. Though the woman on Timothy Standish's cover wears an expression familiar to readers who once contemplated Jim Thompson novels from Lion back in 1954, the art is first-rate illustration. Jonas's story is the tale of family survivors haunted by the ghost of a deceased, but still abusive, father. The paranormal investigator who shows up to help, turns out to be something rather more than he first seems. *By Death Abused* hangs together dandily, and the last line's a killer.



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Issue # 27

GRAHAM MASTERTON is one of England's bestselling horror authors. After an editorial stint at *Penthouse*, he sold the blockbuster novel *The Manitou* and followed it with consecutive hits, such as *Chamel House*, *Mirror*, *Feast*, *Night Warriors*, and *Death Dreams*. Masterton recently edited a hardcover Tor anthology entitled *Scare Care*, to benefit abused and needy children. The story that follows is a graphic tale of local terror.

David climbed tiredly out of the Land Rover, slammed the ill-fitting door, and trudged across the yard with his hands deep in the pockets of his donkey-jacket. It had stopped raining at last, but a coarse cold wind was blowing diagonally across the yard, and above his head the clouds rushed like a muddy-pelted pack of mongrel dogs.

Today had been what he and Malcolm always sardonically called "a pig of a day."

He had left the piggery at half-past five that morning, driven all the way to Chester in the teeming rain with a litter of seven Landrace piglets suffering from suspected swine erysipelas. He had waited two-and-a-half hours for a dithering young health inspector who had missed his rail connection from Coventry. Then he had lunched on steak-and-kidney pudding with a deputy bank manager whose damp suit had reeked like a spaniel, and who had felt himself unable to grant David the loan that he and Malcolm desperately needed in order to repair the roof of the old back barn.

He was wet, exhausted and demoralized. For the first time since they had taken over the piggery from their uncle four-and-a-half years ago, he could see no future for Bryce Prime Pork, even if they sold half of their livestock and most of their acreage, and remortgaged their huge Edwardian house.

He had almost reached the stone steps when he noticed that the lights in the feed plant had been left burning. Damn it, he thought. Malcolm was always so careless. It was Malcolm's over-ambitious investment in new machinery and Malcolm's insistence on setting up their own slaughtering and deep-freezing facilities that had stretched their finances to breaking-point. Bryce Prime Pork had been caught between falling demand and rising costs, and David's dream of becoming a prosperous gentleman farmer had gradually unraveled all around him.

He crossed the sloping yard toward the feed plant. Bryce Prime Pork was one of the cleanest piggeries in

Derbyshire, but there was still a strong smell of ammonia on the evening wind, and the soles of David's shoes slapped against the thin black slime that seemed to cover everything in wet weather. He opened the door to the feed plant and stepped inside. All the lights were on; but there was no sign of Malcolm. Nothing but sacks of fish meal, maize, potatoes, decorticated ground-nut meal, and gray plastic dustbins filled with boiled swill. They mixed their own pig-food, rather than buying proprietary brands -- not only because it cost them three of four percent less, but because Malcolm had developed a mix of swill, cereal and concentrate which not only fattened the pigs more quickly, but gave them award-winning bacon.

David walked up and down the length of the feed plant. He could see his reflection in the night-blackened windows: squatter, more hunched than he imagined himself to be. As he passed the stainless-steel sides of the huge feed grinder, he thought that he looked like a Golem, or a troll, dark and disappointed. Maybe defeat did something to a man's appearance, squashed him out of shape, so that he couldn't recognize himself any longer.

He crossed to the switches by the door, and clicked them off, one after another, and all along the feed plant the fluorescent lights blinked out. Just before he clicked the last switch, however, he noticed that the main switch which isolated the feed-grinder was set to 'off.'

He hesitated, his hand an inch away from the light-switch. Neither Malcolm nor Dougal White, their foreman, had mentioned that there was anything wrong with the machinery. It was all German, made in Dusseldorf by Muller-Koch, and after some initial teething troubles with the grinder blades, it had for more than two years run with seamless efficiency.

David lifted the main switch to 'on' -- and to his surprise, with a smooth metallic scissoring sound, like a carving-knife being sharpened against a steel, the feeding grinder started up immediately.

In the next instant, he heard a hideously distorted shriek -- a gibbering monkeylike yammering of pain and terror that shocked him into stunned paralysis -- unable to understand what the shriek could be, or what he could do to stop it.

He fumbled for the 'off' switch, while all the time the screaming went on and on, growing higher and higher-pitched, racketing from one side of the building to the other, until David felt as if he had suddenly gone mad.

The feed-grinder gradually minced to a halt, and

David crossed stiff-legged as a scarecrow to the huge conical stainless-steel vat. He clambered up the access ladder at the side, and while he did so the screaming died down, and gave way to a complicated mixture of gurgles and groans.

He climbed up to the lip of the feed vat, and saw to his horror that the entire shining surface was rusty-colored with fresh blood -- and that, down at the bottom of the vat, Malcolm was standing, staring up at him wide-eyed, his hands braced tightly against the sloping sides.

He *appeared* to be standing, but as David looked more closely, he began to realize that Malcolm had been churned into the cutting-blades of the feed grinder right up to his waist. He was surrounded by a dark glutinous pool of blood and thickly-minced bone, its surface still punctuated by occasional bubbles. His brown plaid shirt was soaked in blood, and his face was spattered like a map.

David stared at Malcolm and Malcolm stared back at David. The silent agony which both joined and fatally separated them at that instant was far more eloquent than any scream could have been.

"Oh, Christ," said David. "I didn't know."

Malcolm opened and closed his mouth, and a huge pink bubble of blood formed and burst.

David clung tightly to the lip of the feed-grinding vat and held out his hand as far as he could.

"Come on, Malcolm. I'll pull you up. Come on, you'll be all right."

But Malcolm remained as he was, staring, his arms tensed against the sides of the vat, and shook his head. Blood poured in a thick ceaseless ribbon down his chin.

"Malcolm, come on, I can pull you out! Then I'll get an ambulance!"

But again Malcolm shook his head: this time with a kind of dogged fury. It was then that David understood that there was hardly anything left of Malcolm to pull out -- that it wasn't just a question of his legs being tangled in the machinery. The grinder blades had consumed him up to the hip -- reducing his legs and the lower part of his body to a thick smooth paste of bone and muscle, an emulsion of human flesh that would already be dripping down into the collecting churn underneath.

"Oh God, Malcolm, I'll get somebody. Hold on, I'll call for an ambulance. Just hold on!"

"No," Malcolm told him, his voice muffled with shock.

"Just hold on, for Christ's sake!" David screamed at him.

But Malcolm repeated, "No. I want it this way."

"What?" David demanded. "What the hell do you mean?"

Malcolm's fingers squeaked against the bloody sides of the vat. David couldn't begin to imagine what he must be suffering. Yet Malcolm looked up at him now with a smile -- a smile that was almost beatific.

"It's wonderful, David. It's wonderful. I never knew that pain could feel like this. It's better than anything that ever happened. Please, switch it back on. Please."

"Switch it back on?"

Malcolm began to shudder. "You must. I want it so much. Life, love -- they don't count for anything. Not compared with this."

"No," said David. "I can't."

"David," Malcolm urged him, "I'm going to die anyway. But if you don't give me this . . . believe me, I'm never going to let you sleep for the rest of your life."

David remained at the top of the ladder for ten long indecisive seconds.

"Believe me," Malcolm nodded, in that voice that sounded as if it came straight from hell, "it's pure pleasure. Pure pleasure. Beyond pain, David, out of the other side. You can't experience it without dying. But David, David, what a way to go!"

David stayed motionless for one more moment. Then, without a word, he climbed unsteadily back down the ladder. He tried not to think of anything at all as he grasped the feed-grinder's main power switch, and clicked it to 'on.'

From the feed-grinder came a cry that was partly naked agony and partly exultation. It was a cry that made David rigid with horror, and his ill-digested lunch rose in the back of his throat in a sour, thick tide.

He was gripped by a sudden terrible compulsion that he needed to *see*. He scrambled back up the access ladder, gripped the rim of the vat, and stared down at Malcolm with a feeling that was almost like being electrocuted.

The grinding-blades scissored and chopped, and the entire vat surged with blood. Malcolm was still bracing himself at the very bottom, his torso tensed as the grinder blades turned his pelvis and his lower abdomen into a churning mixture of blood, muscle and shredded cloth.

His face was a mask of concentration and tortured ecstasy. He was enjoying it, reveling in it, relishing every second of it. The very extinction of his own life; the very destruction of his own body.

Beyond pain, he had told David. *Out of the other side*.

Malcolm held his upper body above the whirling blades as long as he could, but gradually his strength faded and his hands began to skid inch by inch down the bloody metal sides. His screams of pleasure turned into a cry like nothing that David had ever heard before -- piercing, high-pitched, an ululation of unearthly triumph.

His white stomach was sliced up; skin, fat, intestines; and he began a quivering, jerking last descent into the maw of the feed-grinder.

"David!" he screamed. "David! It's won--"

The blades locked into his ribs. He was whirled

around with his arms lifted as if he were furiously dancing. Then there was nothing but his head, spinning madly in a froth of pink blood. Finally, with a noise like a sink-disposal unit chopping up chicken bones, his head was gone, too, and the grinder spun faster and faster, without any more grist for its terrible mill.

Shaking, David climbed down the ladder and switched the grinder off. There was a long, drying whine, and then silence, except for the persistent worrying of the wind.

What the hell was he going to do now? There didn't seem to be any point in calling for an ambulance. Not only was it pointless -- how was he going to explain that he had switched the feed-grinder back on again, with Malcolm still inside it?

The police would realize that the grinder didn't have the capacity to chop up Malcolm's entire body before David had had the opportunity to switch it off. And he doubted very much if they would understand that Malcolm had been beyond saving -- or that even if he *hadn't* begged David to kill him -- even if he hadn't said how ecstatic it was -- finishing him off was probably the most humane thing that David could have done.

He stood alone in the shed, shivering with shock and indecision. He and Malcolm had been arguing a lot lately -- everybody knew that. Only two weeks ago, they had openly shouted at each other at a livestock auction in Chester. It would only take one suggestion that he might have killed Malcolm deliberately, and he would face arrest, trial, and jail. Even if he managed to show that he was innocent, a police investigation would certainly ruin the business. Who would want to buy Bryce Pork products if they thought that the pigs had been fed from the same grinder in which one of the Bryce brothers had been ground up?

Unless, of course, nobody found out that he *had* been ground up.

Unless nobody found him at all.

He seemed to remember a story that he had read, years ago, about a chicken-farmer who had murdered his wife and fed her to the chickens, and then fed the chickens to other chickens, until no possible traces of his wife remained.

He heard a glutinous dripping noise from the feed-grinder. It wouldn't be long before Malcolm's blood would coagulate, and become almost impossible for him to wash thoroughly away. He hesitated for just one moment; then he switched on the lights again, and went across to the sacks of bran, middlings and soya-bean meal.

Tired and fraught and grief-stricken as he was, tonight he was going to make a pig's dinner.

He slept badly, and woke early. He lay in bed for a long time, staring at the ceiling. He found it difficult to

believe now that what had happened yesterday evening had been real. He felt almost as if it had all been a luridly-colored film. But he felt a cold and undeniable difference inside his soul that told him it had actually happened. A change in himself that would affect him for the rest of his life -- what he thought, what he said, what people he could love, what risks he was prepared to take.

Just after dawn, he saw the lights in the pig-houses flicker on, and he knew that Dougal and Charlie had arrived. He dressed, and went downstairs to the kitchen, where he drank half a pint of freezing-cold milk straight out of the bottle. He brought some of it directly back up again, and had to spit it into the sink. He wiped his mouth on a damp tea-towel and went outside.

Dougal was tethering a Landrace gilt and fixing up a heater for her piglets in a "creep", a boxlike structure hanging alongside her. Piglets under four weeks needed more heat than their mother could provide. Charlie was busy in a pen further along, feeding Old Jeffries, their enormous one-eyed Large Black boar. They bred very few Large Blacks these days: the Danish Landraces were docile and prolific and gave excellent bacon. But Malcolm had insisted on keeping Old Jeffries for sentimental reasons. He had been given to them by their uncle when they took over the business, and had won them their first rosette. "Old Jeffries and I are going to be buried in the same grave," he always used to say.

"Morning, Mr. David," said Dougal. He was a sandy-haired Wiltshireman with a pudgy face and protuberant eyes.

"Morning, Dougal."

"Mr. Malcolm not about yet?"

David shook his head. "No . . . he said something about going to Chester."

"Oh . . . that's queer. We were going to divide up the weaner pool today."

"Well, I can help you do that."

"Mr. Malcolm didn't say when he'd be back?"

"No," said David. "He didn't say a word."

He walked along the rows of pens until he came to Old Jeffries' stall. Charlie had emptied a bucketful of fresh feed into Old Jeffries' trough, and the huge black boar was greedily snuffling his snout into it; although his one yellow eye remained fixed on David as he ate.

"He really likes his breakfast today," Charlie remarked. Charlie was a young curly-haired teenager from the village. He was training to be a veterinarian, but he kept himself in petrol and weekly Chinese takeaways by helping out at Bryce Pork before college.

"Yes . . ." said David. He stared in awful fascination as Old Jeffries snorted and guzzled at the dark red mixture of roughage, concentrate and meat meal that (in two horrific hours of near-madness) he had mixed last night out of Malcolm's soupy remains. "It's a new formula we've been trying."

"Mr. Malcolm sorted out that bearing on the feed-

grinder, then?" asked Charlie.

"Oh . . . oh, yes," David replied. But he didn't take his eyes off Old Jeffries, grunting into his trough; and Old Jeffries didn't for one moment take his one yellow eye off David.

"What did the health inspector say?" asked Charlie.

"Nothing much. It isn't erysipelas, thank God. Just a touch of zinc deficiency. Too much dry food."

Charlie nodded. "I thought it might be that. But this new feed looks excellent. In fact, it smells so good, I tasted a little bit myself."

For the first time, David took his eyes off Old Jeffries. "You did what?"

Charlie laughed. "You shouldn't worry. You know what Malcolm says, he wouldn't feed anything to the pigs that he wouldn't eat himself. I've never come across anybody who loves his livestock as much as your brother. I mean, he really puts himself into these pigs, doesn't he? Body and soul."

Old Jeffries had finished his trough, and was enthusiastically cleaning it with his long inky tongue. David couldn't help watching him in fascination as he licked the last fragments of meat meal from his whiskery cheeks.

"I'm just going to brew up some tea," he said, clapping Charlie on the back.

He left the piggery; but when he reached the door, he could still see Old Jeffries staring at him one-eyed from the confines of his pen, and for some inexplicable reason it made him shudder.

You're tired, shocked, he told himself. But as he closed the piggery door he heard Old Jeffries grunt and whuffle as if he had been dangerously roused.

The telephone rang for Malcolm all day; and a man in a badly-muddied Montego arrived at the piggery, expecting to talk to Malcolm about insurance. David fended everybody off, saying that Malcolm had gone to Chester on business and no, he didn't know when he was coming back. Am I my brother's keeper?

That night, after Dougal had left, he made his final round of the piggery, making sure that the gilts and the sows were all tethered tight, so that they didn't accidentally crush their young; checking the "creeps" and the ventilators; switching off lights.

His last visit was to Old Jeffries. The Large Black stood staring at him as he approached; and made a noise



in his throat like no noise that David had ever heard a boar utter before.

"Well, old man," he said, leaning on the rail of the pen. "It looks as if Malcolm knew what he was talking about. You and he are going to be buried in the same grave."

Old Jeffries curled back his lip and grunted.

"I didn't know what else to do," David told him. "He was dying, right in front of my eyes. God, he couldn't have lived more than five minutes more."

Old Jeffries grunted again. David said, "Thanks, O.J. You're a wonderful conversationalist." He reached over to pat the Large Black's bristly head.

Without any warning at all, Old Jeffries snatched at David's hand, and clamped it between his jaws. David felt his fingers being crushed, and teeth digging right through the palm of his hand. He shouted in pain, and tried to pull himself away, but Old Jeffries twisted his powerful sloped-back neck and heaved David bodily over the railings and into his ammonia-pungent straw.

David's arm was wrenched around behind him, and he felt his elbow crack. He screamed, and tried to turn himself around, but Old Jeffries' four-toed trotter dug into his ribcage, cracking his breastbone and puncturing his left lung. Old Jeffries weighed over 300 kilograms, and even though he twisted and struggled, there was nothing he could do to force the boar off him.

"Dougal!" he screamed, even though he knew that Dougal had left over twenty minutes ago. "Oh God, help me! Somebody!"

Grunting furiously, Old Jeffries trampled David and worried his bloody hand between his teeth. To his horror, David saw two of his fingers drop from Old Jeffries' jaw, and fall into the straw. The boar's bristly sides kept scorching his face: taut and coarse and pungent with the smell of pig.

He dragged himself backwards, out from under the boar's belly, and grabbed hold of the animal's back with his free hand, trying to pull himself upright. For a moment, he thought he had managed it, but then Old Jeffries let out a shrill squeal of rage, and burrowed his snout furiously and aggressively between David's thighs.

"No!" David screamed. "No! Not that! Not that!"

But he felt sharp teeth tearing through corduroy, and then half of his inside thigh being torn away from the bone, with a bloody crackle of fat and tissue. And then Old Jeffries ripped him between the legs. He felt the boar's teeth puncture his groin, he felt cords and tubes and fats being wrenched away. He threw back his head and he let out a cry of anguish, and wanted to die then, right then, with no more pain, nothing but blackness.

But Old Jeffries retreated, trotting a little way away from him with his gory prize hanging from his mouth. He stared at David with his one yellow eye as if

he were daring him to take it back.

David sicked up blood. Then, letting out a long whimpering sound, he climbed up to his feet, and cautiously limped to the side of the pen. He could feel that he was losing pints of blood. It pumped warm and urgent down his trouser-leg. He knew that he was going to die. But he wasn't going to let this pig have him. He was going to go the way that Malcolm had gone. Beyond pain, out on the other side. He was going to go in the ultimate ecstasy.

He opened the pen, and hobbled along the piggery, leaving a wide wet trail of blood behind him. Old Jeffries hesitated for a few moments, and then followed him, his trotters clicking on the concrete floor.

David crossed the yard to the feed buildings. He felt cold, cold, cold -- colder than he had ever felt before. The wind banged a distant door over and over again, like a flat-toned funeral drum. Old Jeffries followed him, twenty or thirty yards behind, his one eye shining yellow in the darkness.

*To market, to market, to buy a fat pig
Home again, home again, jiggety-jig.*

Coughing, David opened the door of the feed building. He switched on the lights, leaning against the wall for support. Old Jeffries stepped into the doorway and watched him, huge and black, but didn't approach any closer. David switched the feed-grinder to 'on' and heard the hum of machinery and the scissoring of precision-ground blades.

David sicked up blood. Then, letting out a long whimpering sound, he climbed up on to his feet, and cautiously limped to the side of the pen. He could feel that he was losing pints of blood. It pumped warm and urgent down his trouser-leg . . .

It seemed to take him an age to climb the access ladder to the rim of the vat. When he reached the top, he looked down into the circular grinder, and he could see the blades flashing as they spun around.

Ecstasy, that's when Malcolm had told him. Pleasure beyond pain.

He swung his bloodied legs over the rim of the vat. He closed his eyes for a moment, and said a short prayer. Dear God, forgive me. Dear mother, please forgive me.

Then he released his grip, and tumble-skidded down the stainless steel sides, his feet plunging straight into the grinder blades.

He screamed in terror; and then he screamed in agony. The blades sliced relentlessly into his feet, his ankles, his shins, his knees. He watched his legs ground up in a bloody chaos of bone and muscle, and the pain was so intense that he pounded at the sides of the vat with his fists. This wasn't ecstasy. This was sheer nerve-tearing pain -- made even more intense by the hideous knowledge that he was already mutilated beyond any hope of survival -- that he was as good as dead already.

The blades cut into his thighs. He thought he had fainted but he hadn't fainted, *couldn't* faint, because the pain was so fierce that it penetrated his subconscious, penetrated every part of his mind and body.

He felt his pelvis shattered, crushed, chopped into paste. He felt his insides drop out of him. Then he was caught and tangled in the same way that Malcolm had been caught and tangled, and for a split-second he felt himself whirled around, a wild Dervish dance of sheer agony. Malcolm had lied. Malcolm had lied. Beyond pain there was nothing but more pain. On the other side of pain was a blinding sensation that made pain feel like a caress.

The blades bit into his jaw. His face was obliterated. There was a brief whirl of blood and brains and then he was gone.

The feed-grinder whirled and whirled for over an hour. Then -- with no feed to slow down its blades -- it overheated and whined to a halt.

Blood dripped; slower and slower.

Old Jeffries remained where he was, standing in the open doorway, one-eyed, the cold night wind ruffling his bristles.

Old Jeffries knew nothing about retribution. Old Jeffries knew nothing about guilt.

But something that Old Jeffries didn't understand had penetrated the black primitive knots of his cortex -- a need for revenge so powerful that it had been passed

-- CD

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DARK TWILIGHT

Novel Excerpt by JOSEPH A. CITRO

DARK TWILIGHT is about a man who comes to Vermont intending to scientifically establish the existence of a Loch-Ness type monster said to inhabit Lake Champlain. The following excerpt is taken from a monologue by Oliver Ransom. It's a transcript of testimony in which Ransom describes his sighting of the Lake Champlain Monster. He and his son Cliff were fishing from a rowboat when it happened. Oliver's story is typical of authentic Lake Champlain Monster sightings.

**

Now lemme see if I can get this just right. Me and my boy, Cliff, we was out in my boat, a little aluminum job from Sears.

We was in the bay . . . What's that? Oh, it was St. Albans Bay, just east of Friar's Island. The lake was real calm an' dark, just like one big sheet of black ice. It was startin' to get dark out, and I could see red in the sky. They was thick black clouds overhead, an' they was somethin' about that calm, like any second them big clouds is gonna pucker up and let loose one helluva rainstorm. There's somethin' about that kind of an evenin' makes you want to talk in whispers, makes you feel real close to whoever you're with.

An' a-course that's the best time of day for fishin'. All around us, off in the distance, there was little boats with fellas settin' in 'em. Nobody's payin' no attention to nobody else. Fishin's a private thing, if you know what I mean.

Well sir, everybody was just watchin' their lines, lookin' at the little spot where it disappears under the water, waitin' for it to move, waitin' for some fish to take it.

Okay, it's this next part I want to get just right for you. I want you to see it just the way I done.

Cliff, well, he's a quiet boy. Oh, he's got his share of the devil in him, same as any boy. But Cliff's devil's a quiet one. Pretty quick he says to me, 'Dad, I got somebody!'

Well sir, at first I figger he's kiddin', that is until his fishpole bends jest about in half, bends nearly to breakin'!

I can see he's hooked into somethin' pretty big, walleye, most likely, or maybe some big-ass bass . . .

'Let up yer drag!' I hollers at him. You could hear that drag screechin' as the thing's pullin' out line. No point tryin' to reel in, too much fish headin' for deep

water.

The tip of the boy's pole is vibratin' like the tail of a rattler, and ol' Cliff, he's gettin' scared.

'What is it, Dad?' he says. I see him sweatin' and shakin'. There's a look on his face like he's tryin' to cover up how scared he is.

'Let her take line,' I tells him. 'Let her have all she wants!'

Right now I'm thinkin' maybe he's hooked into one of them salmon. Or a laker, maybe.

So Cliff's pullin' real hard, and the thing's takin' line, an' that ol' pole of his, why it's bent right around like one of them divinin' rods over a spring.

Cliff, he keeps lookin' at me, then at the water. He's sweatin' more and more, and actin' more and more scared.

Finally he says, 'Here, Dad, you bring him in.' And he starts to hand me his pole.

Well, I figure it's his fish, so I say, 'No sir. You play it out,' but before we can argue about it, the fightin' stops.

If you ain't a fisherman you don't know that dreadful feelin' of calm that comes right after your line goes limp and your fish gets away. It's a lonely feelin', a feelin' of failure.

Cliff's lookin' broken-hearted as can be as he's windin' in line. And me, I don't know whether to say let's go home, or let's try a few more casts. I mean, we both know there's somethin' pretty Goddamn . . . excuse me . . . somethin' pretty awful darn big out there. But common sense tells us we won't get another crack at it tonight.

So Cliff's reelin' in, and I'm tryin' to think of somethin' nice to say to him, when all of a sudden somethin' hits the boat!

Ka-thunk!

Sounds like we bottomed-out of a submerged log. But the thing is, we ain't movin' at all. Plus, why crapes, we're way the heck out in the middle of the lake! I mean, any logs or stones or anythin' like that would have to be twenty, thirty feet straight down!

I think both of us got real scared then. Cliff's still a-shiverin' and a-shakin' till all of a sudden he lets out a holler, like the devil hisself had jumped up and bit him on the ass . . . oh, sorry . . . the behind. His fishpole jumps right out of his hands! It dives into the water and heads down in-underneath the boat!

Well, heck, I figure whatever he's hooked into never really got away, she jest doubled back and swarmed right in under the boat to hide! An' I'll tell ya one

thing, mister, no fish I ever seen will do that!

So I makes a grab for Cliff's pole. Trouble is, she's movin' way too fast and I cuts my hand on the monofil'ment.

Now we're lookin' out over the water, tryin' to see what it was that's playin' with us. Tryin' to figure what's goin' on.

It's later now, darker, but there's a moon. Some of the other boats had gone in. You could see one or two was still out there with Coleman lanterns, way off in the distance. I remember how you could see their lights reflected in the water along with the reflection of the moon. No mirror was ever any smoother than the surface of that lake.

Just then I seen somethin' kinda movin' off on the right hand side of the boat, off toward Melville Landin'. The water starts ripplin' and churnin', and then it's like one of them logs that ain't supposed to be there's a-bobbin' right up to the surface.

And all of a sudden -- and Cliff seen it too -- this black, pointy head comes right up out of the water! The head and neck is kind of juttin' out on an angle, like the blade of a jackknife openin' up.

I can see the water drippin' off it as it comes higher and higher. An' I'm thinkin' to myself, why Godfrey-mighty, this can't be real! But it keeps comin' and comin', like a snake a-crawlin' out of his hole.

It's all black, don't ya know, and shiny. An' it's evil lookin', like somethin' out of an old movie, or some kinda bad dream.

And in the moonlight I can see Cliff's nightcrawler, all white and puffy-lookin', hangin' out of its mouth, and the monofil'ment line, like a long strand of silver thread, trailin' off into the lake.

There musta been six foot of head and neck juttin' out of the water, and I'll tell you, mister, I wasn't interested in seein' what sort of body that neck was connected to!

But you know, the funny thing . . . I mean the thing I'm always gonna remember jest as long as I live, is the way that head turned, slow and easy-like, just like the beam of a lighthouse. That head kept on turnin' until its eyes locked right tight on me and my boy.

Well sir, I looked right into the eyes of that thing, and it looked right into mine. It didn't act scared or nothin', we just kept lookin', eye to eye, as if the thing was tryin' to remember me, like it was tryin' to memorize everythin' about me so it wouldn't never forget.

Anyways, after a while it just slides back into the water, without a sound, just as if it'd never been there.

And me and Cliff, why cripes, we high-tailed it for home . . .

-- CD

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THE "BY ANY OTHER NAME" QUIZ

When is a horror film not a horror film? Ok, ok, that's a trick question, but it makes sense when you think of all the alternate titles there are for many well-known or cult-status horror flicks -- especially since some of the titles seem to bear no relation to each other (or the movie itself, for that matter!). If two people have seen the same film under different titles, or slightly different cuts (some films were longer in Europe, and thus given new titles), they might not even realize that they're talking about the same movie when discussing it, thus provoking many an argument, or the placing of many a bet. To find out how much of an edge you have in the name game, try to match the best-known titles listed at RIGHT with the many variants listed to the LEFT. Three films at right have two alternate titles listed, while one film has three variant titles given. Anything over one third correct is excellent.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. Andy Warhol's <i>Dracula</i> (1974) | a. <i>Alice, Sweet Alice</i> |
| 2. <i>Communion</i> (1976) (Not the UFO flick from 1989) | b. <i>Blood for Dracula</i> |
| 3. <i>The Corpse</i> (1970) | c. <i>Castle of Doom</i> |
| 4. <i>Demon</i> (1976) | d. <i>Crucible of Terror</i> |
| 5. <i>The Fearless Vampire Killers</i> ;
or: <i>Pardon Me, but Your Teeth
are in My Neck</i> | e. <i>Curse of the Demon</i> |
| 6. <i>Freaks</i> (1932) | f. <i>Dance of the Vampires</i> |
| 7. <i>The Most Dangerous Game</i> (1932) | g. <i>Forbidden Love</i> |
| 8. <i>Night is the Phantom</i> (1963) | h. <i>Gold Told Me To</i> |
| 9. <i>Night of the Demon</i> (1958) | i. <i>Holy Terror</i> |
| 10. <i>Vampyr</i> (1932) | j. <i>Hounds of Zardoff</i> |
| | k. <i>The Monster Show</i> |
| | l. <i>Nature's Mistakes</i> |
| | m. <i>Skull Island</i> |
| | n. <i>Velvet House</i> |
| | o. <i>What?</i> |

(Quiz answers on page 96)

paul sammon's



Last time out we discussed a fairly arcane area of film production -- unit publicity -- and how certain lateral career moves within the motion picture business might be good for you. This go-round we find ourselves on more conventional ground, reviewing two films on videocassette. But let's get something straight; these are *not* your everyday movie rentals.

Then again, what did you expect from the article that bills itself, "Not your ordinary film column?"

..

For the past 18 months I've been writing my "film book", a magnum opus which will hopefully preclude my ever having to write another book on movies again. Titled *Blood and Rockets: The 500 Best Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films on Videotape*, this major reference guide is due out around Christmas 1991 from Prentice-Hall. It will clock in at roughly 300,000 words and, as for subject matter, the title explains all.

What I've attempted in *Blood and Rockets* is to synthesize a lifetime of film passions and experiences through the multiple viewpoints of viewer, critic and filmmaker. This indicates that over the past year and

a half I've been seeing a lot of movies. A whole, *whole* lot of movies. And in trying to weed out what I consider quality product, I've come across any number of obscure, cult or just plain unknown films (a word, here; I expect some people will be surprised at certain titles I've included in *Blood and Rockets* -- films like *Point Blank*, *Come and See*, and *Straw Dogs* -- and will demand to know how I can justify calling them sf, horror or fantasy films. Well, to get those answers ... you'll have to read the book).

In any event, for this column I thought it might be nice to examine two fringe videos, pictures that are out there on the commercial rim. And though these films are not given the same exhaustive treatments they receive in *Blood and Rockets*, at least now you'll have some overall idea as to how I'll be treating such entries in my book (since old Paul's never adverse to a little advance publicity). Further, and despite their relative anonymity, I guarantee these videos' inherent quality. Whether you actually *enjoy* them, of course, depends on such variables as sophistication, sensitivity and taste -- not to mention when you were last laid or what chemical substances you imbibe before popping these cassettes into your VCR ...

One next-to-final thought:

don't give up on trying to find these films just because they aren't available at your neighborhood Blockbuster Video store (a chain I boycott, by the way, since Blockbuster refuses to carry X-rated films ... or "controversial works" like *The Last Temptation of Christ*). Be *creative* in your search; use common sense. You're more likely to find obscure genre titles at your local mom 'n pop (or ethnically-oriented) video outlet than you are at Tower Records. And as a last resort, there are always the genre-rich, mail order video businesses like *Sinister Cinema*, *Dickens Video*, or *Video Mania* to assist you in title searches; if these outfits don't have what you're after, chances are they can point you in the right direction.

In conclusion, let me point out that there's no hidden agenda behind my enthusiasms for these films, other than the fact that I'm trying to promote my book. Just pretend I'm a good little scout pointing out new pieces of twisted geographies, strange landscapes I've visited before, ones I think you'll enjoy rolling around and getting your clothes dirty in.

Got those fingers on the fast forward button?

Good.

Let's hit it.

**

Two Recommended Videos
(from *Blood and Rockets*)

IDAHO TRANSFER (1973).

***1/2. Color. 88 minutes.

Videocassette Source: MPI
Home Entertainment

Director: Peter Fonda

Screenplay: Thomas Mat-
thiesen

Producer: William Hayward

Cinematography: Bruce
Logan

Music: Bruce Langehorne

Starring: Keith Carradine,
Kelley Bohanan, Kevin Hearst,
Caroline Hildebrand

Genre: Science fiction
(ecological disaster)

Throughout the 1970's, and based on the success of his 1969 *Easy Rider* (which he co-produced), Peter Fonda directed a number of interesting films. Among them were such westerns as *The Hired Hand* (1971) and *Wanda Nevada* (1979). But while *The Hired Hand* received the most press, it's Fonda's little-seen, cautionary time-travel drama *Idaho Transfer* which remains his enduring directorial work.

A group of young scientists (late teens/early twenties) are shuttling back and forth between the early 1970's and the mid-21st century, trying to make sense of a seemingly worldwide catastrophe which has decimated life on our future earth. But politics and madness strand them in the year 2044; eventually, they discover the cause of the calamity, but not before facing an increasingly hostile environment, as well as the threats lurking within their own interior landscapes.

Idaho Transfer was dumped into a few theaters in 1973, received virtually no recognition (other than a short, laudatory review in *Cinefantastique* magazine that same year), and then promptly dropped out of

sight. But, in 1989, MPI Home Entertainment picked *Transfer* up for home video, complete with a newly-taped prefatory interview by director Peter Fonda. And here's a case where a motion picture's rescue from near oblivion is cause for rejoicing, for *Idaho Transfer* is that rare instance of an obscure film which actually deserves its videotaped resurrection.

Smart, subtle and quiet, *Transfer* is something of an anomaly, primarily because of its handling of theme and approach. First, this is an intelligent science fiction film that refuses to slap its message over the viewer's head (*Transfer's* warning concerns the now-trendy threat of environmental extinction which simply fell under the blanket term "ecology" back in 1973). Secondly, *Idaho Transfer* takes the chancy risk of insisting that its audience work towards deciphering its elliptical, connect-the-dots narrative. It never plays down to the viewer, and in the hyper-inflated imagery-at-any-cost approach of contemporary sf films, this lack of pandering is refreshingly welcome.

Not that this is exactly an art film. Far from it. But *Idaho Transfer* is an unusually adult and moody offering, one basically structured like a hip mystery story/survival adventure; the frosting on this particular cake is that the science fiction elements are imaginative and well-integrated into the storyline. For example, the script provides a plausible biological rationale as to why only young people can time travel, and the time-traveling process itself (only referred to throughout as a "transfer"), has a meticulously low-tech, plausible realism.

The film isn't faultless, of course. The acting, mostly by a group of non-professionals and a barely on-screen Keith Carradine, is predictably variable. And this young cast's wardrobe and hairstyles have become painfully dated; there are also snatches of irritatingly hippy-dippy music on the soundtrack.

But overall, *Idaho Transfer* is

commendably cool and sardonic, and surprisingly ahead of its time (not only with its urgent environmentalism; the protagonists of this particular picture are all women). Director Fonda also works wonders with a small budget -- particularly in his regard for the on-location shots of the spectacularly barren Idaho landscapes -- and there are some surprisingly savage jibes at politics, male/female relationships and selfishness. In fact, Fonda's control is so tight that one not only comes away from *Transfer* with the notion that Peter Fonda was a surprisingly assured director, but with a sense of sadness that he didn't continue his career behind the camera (as an example, Fonda manages to come up with a single shot -- an empty sandwich wrapper drifting across an outcropping of naked rock -- that perfectly summarizes all of his films' themes and concerns).

Taut, controlled, ahead of its time. A mature film teeming with ideas and ambition... not to mention one supplied with an unexpectedly jolting -- and downbeat -- twist ending.

Is it any wonder that *Idaho Transfer* flopped in 1973?

HELPFUL HINT: if you can't find *Transfer* in your local video store's science fiction department, look for it in the drama section. That's where the *Music Plus* chain stores carry it.

IN A GLASS CAGE (1985).
***. Color. 111 minutes.

Videocassette Source:
CineVista Video

Director: Agustin Villaronga

Screenplay: Agustin Vil-
laronga

Producer: Teresa Enrich

Cinematography: Jaume
Peracaula

Music: Yavier Nava

Editor: Raul Roman

Makeup: Elisenda de

Villanueva

Special Effects: Reyes

Abades

Iron Lung By: Tort Y

Masats

Starring: Gunter Meisner, David Sust, Marisa Paredes, Gisela Echevarria, Inma Colomer, Josue Guasch, David Cuspinera, Ricardo Carcelero, Alberto Manzano

Genre: Psychosexual horror (psychosexual/gay)

In the late 70's/early 80's, the publication of the *The Fifty Worst Films of All Time* and *The Golden Turkeys* series galvanized a whole subcult eager to worship ephemeral cinema. Later publications/books like *Fangoria* and *Incredibly Strange Films* fanned the cultish flames, tossing in the elements of explicit carnage and exploitation films. And somewhere, running like a particularly virulent virus through these subcults, was the fevered notion of projects that went too far, of movies that ran -- full tilt and screaming -- right over the edge of bad taste. These "works" included inherently pustulant projects like *Nekromantik* (with pissing women, dead cats wrung out into bathtubs, and male corpses equipped with broomstick genitals), motion pictures which gleefully strove for a whole new redefinition of the word "sick."

Most of these films, of course, are assembled with purely adolescent intent (all those trashy *Friday the 13th* sequels immediately come to mind). But there are a handful of genuinely disturbing, truly repellent offerings, those whose warped ideation or twisted aesthetic -- their intellectual aberrations, if you will -- lay the foundation for a purely revolting filmgoing experience.

One such infamous motion picture is Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò*. As for another . . . well, I'd recommend forgetting all those Italian zombie gut-crunchers and the corpse-fucking *Nekromantik*. To my way of thinking, it's the little-known *In A Glass Cage* that wins the sleaze sweep-

stakes hands down. For here's your basic gay-Nazi-pederast-Dario Argento wannabe, a film that's one seriously diseased little beast.

Present day. Somewhere in Spain. While hiding with his wife and family under an assumed name, a German WW II war criminal (Gunter Meisner) finds himself in the grip of the same perverse compulsions he surrendered to as an SS officer; namely, the kidnapping, torturing and murdering of young boys. Sickened by his impulses, this Aryan child molester tries to commit suicide. However, he only succeeds in paralyzing himself. Now trapped within a transparent iron lung (the "glass cage" of the title), the ex-Nazi experiences his own terrors as a mysterious male nurse (David Sust) slowly dominates the German's household through a combination of murder, spiritual madness and homosexual rape. And both Nazi and nurse are being studied, in turn, by the eyes of Rena (Gisela Echevarria), an innocent little girl.

What's particularly subversive about *In A Glass Cage* is its external gloss; what's particularly repellent is it's apparent embrace of the horrors it portrays. But before I launch into an attack on this creepy slice of pathology (and there's just no way I can excuse *Cage's* underlying decay), let me first explain something; I'm not denouncing *In A Glass Cage's* obvious function as erotic homosexual fantasy. Since the film's sexual dynamic is blatantly gay, and as making male/male lovemaking arousing is one level to which *Cage* obviously strives for and achieves, then its sexual fantasy aspect can be evaluated as obviously effective (though just as obviously exclusionary; whatever gets you off, right?).

The real problem is that, superficially, *Cage* is an exceedingly well-crafted art film. It's rigorously directed (with a taut atmosphere, gliding camera, and sumptuous production values), has a supposedly "serious" theme (concentration camp atrocities), is populated with arrest-

ing characters (though everyone in this film is in dire need of immediate psychiatric help), and is peppered with surreal audio/visual flourishes (the wheezing iron lung is so shot and layered with organic sound effects that it eventually becomes another living character).

Just the sort of thing you'd expect to see on PBS, or maybe the *Bravo* cable tv network, yes? No way. Because beneath *Cage's* arthouse imagery and oblique subtitles beats a truly perverse heart. This is a film that sends out confusing messages concerning its underlying concepts of homosexual child abuse, because, basically, *In A Glass Cage* is *fascinated* with sexual humiliation (there are any number of bizarre linkings between sex and violence here, including a strangulation by oral rape; one particularly horrific sequence involves a helpless peasant boy who's made to sing while systematically, and pathetically brutalized).


So while *In A Glass Cage* may be polished, stylish and "artistically" realized, it's a hollow accomplishment -- this is a film the Marquis De Sade would have been proud to have directed.

Having said all that . . . I still enjoyed it. *Cage* is exactly the kind of project you love to hate, what with its superior craft, rotten ethics and enormous black comedy potential. Talk about a conflicted viewing experience! *Cage's* queasy fascination lies in its tangle of whole-hearted decadence and gripping technique; for the strong of stomach, and those willing to question its underlying attraction to its repellent concerns, this really is some kind of bent masterpiece.

It's also one heck of a party tape!

Just don't tell anyone I told you so.

HELPFUL HINT: Look for *In A Glass Cage* in the "Foreign Films" department of your local video store. And yes, it is subtitled.



SPLATTERPUNKS: EXTREME HORROR

Introduction

PAUL SAMMON

NIGHT THEY MISSED THE HORROR SHOW ♦ JOE R. LANSDALE

THE MIDNIGHT MEAT TRAIN ♦ CLIVE BARKER

FILM AT ELEVEN ♦ JOHN SKIPP

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REUNION MOON ♦ REX MILLER

I SPIT IN YOUR FACE: Films That Bite ♦ CHAS. BALUN

FREAKTENT ♦ NANCY A. COLLINS

CRUCIFAX AUTUMN: The Censored Chapter ♦ RAY GARTON

GOOSEBUMPS ♦ RICHARD CHRISTIAN MATHESON

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FULL THROTTLE ♦ PHILIP NUTMAN

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EDITED BY PAUL SAMMON

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BENTLEY LITTLE's first novel, *The Revelation*, (St. Martin's hardcover) was published last year to rave reviews. His second book, *The Mailman* (NAL) will be released this winter. This is Bentley's fourth appearance in *Cemetery Dance*.

He kept them on the top floor -- the reconstructed skeletons of all the women he'd killed. He'd put the first one in the den next to his desk. And the second one. And the third one. But soon they were overflowing into the guest bedroom, into the bathroom, into the hall, until they had taken over the entire top floor of the house.

He had often thought of hiring a professional to cover the bones with lifelike latex, make the skeletons into realistic copies of the women he'd killed, but he knew there was no way he could ask someone to do that without arousing suspicion. And there was certainly no one in town who could perform such detailed work.

Besides, he liked his women the way they were. Each night, an hour before bedtime, he would stand at the bottom of the stairs, looking upward into the blackness, seeing the milky forms of the bones in the dark. He would take off his clothes -- his shoes first, then his socks, then his shirt, his pants, his underwear -- and walk upstairs, where he would wander amongst the rows of skeletons, murmuring softly, letting his bare flesh brush against the cold smoothness of bone, before picking out a companion for the night.

Sheriff Walker Hayman was a happy man.

••

There was a knock at the door, and Hayman looked up from his paperwork. "What is it?"

The door opened. "Sheriff?" Jim Pritchard walked into the office and cleared his throat nervously. "We've caught one, sir."

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"Adult or child?"

"Adult."

"Excellent." The sheriff stood up, putting down his pen. "Lead me to her."

He followed his deputy down the hall to the first holding cell where a well-dressed woman in her early thirties was pacing the floor angrily. She looked up as the

two men entered, and Hayman saw, beneath a lock of blond hair, the gash in her forehead where she'd been hit by a pistol butt.

He hoped it wouldn't leave a dent on her skull.

He could tell she had a nice skull.

"What is the meaning of this?" the woman demanded. "By what right are you holding me?"

Hayman smiled. "Afternoon, little lady."

"I'm not a little lady. I'm a big lady. With big money. And I can afford to buy some big legal talent." She shook an angry finger in his direction. "I'm going to have you up before a review board so fast it'll make your head spin. And as for these apes you have working for you--"

Pritchard stepped threateningly forward, but the sheriff held him back.

"--this is the worst display of police brutality I have ever seen. I was not even speeding. I was pulled over for . . . for I don't know what. For being a woman--"

"Yes," Pritchard said.

"Did you hear that?" She appealed to the sheriff. "He admitted it."

Hayman nodded, smiled, and took out his gun.

"Do you want it here or in public?"

The woman stared at him, shocked. "What?"

He put a bullet through her stomach and watched as she crumpled to the floor, holding both hands over the gushing wound, her mouth a round circle of pain and disbelief. He turned to Pritchard. "Get this mess cleared up," he said. "And bring her to me when she's clean."

He returned to his office, feeling good.

He hoped the bullet hadn't nicked a bone.

••

Mayor Jim Johnson answered the door on the fourth ring and was surprised to see the sheriff standing before him with a gift-wrapped box in his hand.

"Jim," Hayman said, nodding in greeting.

The mayor eyed the box greedily, knowing what it contained without asking. "You got another one, didn't you?" he asked, grinning. He slapped the sheriff on the back. "You old rounder!"

Hayman handed over the package, and the mayor eagerly tore it open, pulling out a green professional dress of the latest style. Beneath the dress, he found matching shoes, gold stud earrings, a small handbag,

panty hose, a slip, a black lace bra and white cotton panties. "I can't believe this!" he said.

The sheriff laughed. "There's a small bullet hole in the dress, but other than that, everything's in perfect shape. The blood washed out with no problem."

"Anna's going to love this!" The mayor looked at Hayman apologetically. "I'm sorry, I have to let Anna try these on. It's been so long since she's had any new clothes, and--"

"I understand," the sheriff said. "I've got to be heading home anyway."

"Thank you!" the mayor called out as Hayman retreated, waving, down the driveway. He shut the door and ran upstairs. "Anna!" he called. "I have something for you!"

He pulled open the door of the bedroom. His wife was hanging from the ceiling, spinning slightly, though there was no breeze. In the year since he'd strung her up, the rope had sunk into the decaying flesh of her neck. Her clothes, last changed two months ago, were dirty and stained and rank with absorbed bodily fluids.

Excited, the mayor ripped off his wife's dress and pulled off her underwear. He lovingly caressed the new clothes. "We're going to have so much fun," he said.

••

Hayman slept well, knowing that he had done a good job. The parts of the woman were distributed to those in the town who would benefit most, and her stripped frame was now soaking in a cleaning solution at the fire station. By tomorrow night, he would have another skeleton to add to his growing stable.

He awoke refreshed and happy in the morning, and made himself some pancakes, whistling a cheerful tune as he listened to Paul Harvey's report on the radio. The phone rang halfway through breakfast, and he answered it with one hand while he turned pancakes with the other. "Hello?"

"Sheriff? We got another one!"

Hayman laughed. "I'll be right there." He hung up the phone, wolfed down his pancakes and put the dirty dishes in the sink.

He could tell it was going to be a wonderful day.

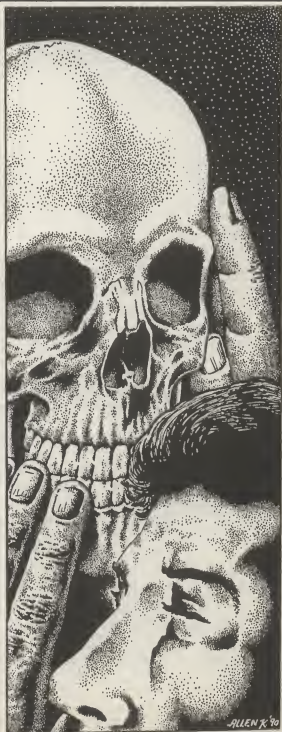
••

There was a crowd gathered around the car parked in front of the sheriff's office. The lights and siren were off, but apparently the news had leaked out. Hayman pushed through the sea of excited faces and saw the girl in the back seat of the car. She could not have been more than fifteen or sixteen. Her face was battered, her clothes

ripped, and there was a look of panic on her pretty face.

"Too young," the sheriff announced, looking at the girl. "She's not a woman yet. She's not ready to die." He motioned to one of his deputies. "Put her with the others."

The deputy nodded, yanking the girl out of the car, and Hayman looked at her closely. She was skinny, almost anorexic, and her bones showed through in several places. They were nice bones, well formed, and he



found himself becoming excited. "Never mind," he said, grabbing the teenager's arm. "I'll take her." He could feel the stiff wrist joint through her thin skin.

The crowd disbursed as he led her in back of the sheriff's office toward the Minor House. Holding tight to her arm, feeling the reassuring hardness of bone beneath his fingers, he dragged her down the narrow path through the field.

"Don't hurt me!" she said, her voice frightened. "I'll do anything you want!"

He ignored her.

"I'll do you right here, if you want it! Any way you like!"

Shocked, he slapped her face. She burst into tears, one hand moving up to rub the red spot on her skin. Not even a woman yet, but already a slut. Oh, she was going to be a fun one to dispose of. Hell, he might even strangle her with his own hands if he got the chance.

The Minor House was before them now, the false glass over its bricked windows reflecting the bright morning sun. Hayman nodded to Tim Feldspur, the guard who stood up and pulled out his key ring. "Got us a new one, huh?"

The sheriff nodded. "Open 'er up."

Feldspur unlocked the series of latches and deadbolts which sealed shut the metal door. Gun at the ready, he pulled the door open.

In the dark furnitureless interior of the Minor House, the sheriff saw the press of teeming underage bodies writhing on top of each other.

"No!" the girl cried. She tried to twist away from him, but his grip was too strong. She looked pleadingly at Feldspur. "I'll do you!" she said. "Anything you want!"

Hayman pushed her into the Minor House and shut the door. "Lock it," he told the guard. He smiled. "I'll be back for her in a few years."

••

He spent that night with the first woman he'd killed, Titia Realto. Her bones were cold and unyielding at first, but he warmed them up, and under the covers she came to life for him. It was a glorious feeling and, as always, he enjoyed himself in a way that he hadn't found possible before The Change.

He fell asleep, satisfied and secure.

He awoke feeling the knife against his throat.

It was the girl he'd consigned to the Minor House this morning. Her face was covered with fresh blood, and he knew instantly that she had somehow killed Feldspur. A cold rationality and panicked dementia were battling it out for supremacy on her features. "Get up!" she demanded. "Now!"

He slowly pushed aside the covers, careful not to jar the bones of Titia, trying to remember where he'd put his revolver.

The knife pressed harder against his throat, and he felt a sharp flash of pain as it drew blood. "You do exactly what I say, or I'll off you right here."

"Okay," he croaked.

She forced him down the stairs, still nude, and into his car. Lights off, he followed her directions out of town. She seemed to know the way well, and he realized that she had probably lived here before The Change.

He expected to see a horde of other girls roaming about town, freed from their confinement, but the streets were empty. He had half-hoped to spot another man, in which case he would instantly crash the car and hope for the best, certain at least of some aid, but there was no one. The town was dead.

Then they were outside the town limits and speeding through the desert. She allowed the lights here, but they only emphasized the loneliness of the road, and he knew that if she abandoned him out this way he would probably not be able to get back.

It was nearly dawn when he saw the lights of another town. What was her plan? Was she going to turn him over to the authorities? They'd never do anything to him. He looked over at her. In the gradually increasing light of dawn and the soft glow of the dashboard lights, she looked mad, crazed. He only hoped she wasn't going to subject him to some sort of vigilante justice.

"Slow down," she ordered. She reached over and honked the horn twice.

The car passed an empty gas station and a closed hamburger stand.

Ahead, he saw a black shape in the road, something large and shadowy.

The girl told him to slow down again, and as the black shape approached him, he saw that it was a gang of women.

••

The woman looked over her collection of heads, lined up in order of size, tongues protruding. Well, they weren't really tongues. She'd had Beth Kandinsky, the nurse, sew on false appendages made out of red rubber, but they looked good and they suited her needs. She walked down the row of shelves, her eyes settling on her newest prize -- the sheriff Kate had captured.

He was an ugly sucker, but Beth had affixed an extra long tongue to his mouth and that more than made up for it.

She thought for a moment, then picked the head up by the hair. She would take it to bed tonight, try it out. A shiver of anticipation ran through her. It had been a long time since she'd had a new conquest. She carried the head to the bedroom and put it on her pillow, turning down the covers. She switched off the lights and slipped off her nightie.

Mayor Deborah Jones was a happy woman. - CD

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A TASTE OF HOTTER BLOOD

Edited by JEFF GELB & MICHAEL GARRETT

INTRODUCTION

In this, the AIDS era, it's easy enough to draw an analogy between sex and horror. But in fiction, readers have long been drawn to a mix of these tantalizing topics. Experienced vicariously from their armchairs (and even more appropriately, *beds*), generations of readers and film-lovers have found sex and horror a marriage made in Heaven . . . or sometimes Hell. From fiction classics such as *Dracula* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* to box office smashes like *Psycho* and *Fatal Attraction*, the coupling of sex and horror has made for interesting, if strange, bedfellows.

The idea for the *Hot Blood* anthology series was born out of our lifelong friendship and mutual interest in horror fiction. When we both decided to try our hand at writing, the first markets to which we sold our tales of terror were the men's magazines, some of the most lucrative training grounds for fiction writers. Both of us wrote erotic horror stories for magazines like *Chic* and *Hustler*, using pseudonyms because those publications require street-level language with which we were both uncomfortable. But the stories themselves, minus the salty verbiage, were works we were quite proud of, and wished they could reach a wider audience of horror aficionados.

We first conceived of *Hot Blood* as an anthology reprinting our own erotic horror fiction, but it didn't take long to realize that, as novices, our chances of selling the work would be slim. What if, we then hypothesized, we asked the field's key writers to contribute their sexual nightmares to an anthology? The idea was immediately appealing to us both -- it was a book *we'd* want to read as horror fans. And we assumed (correctly, as it turned out) we were not alone.

The call went out to the field's preeminent authors, and the first book very quickly took shape. A top-ten horror category bestseller, *Hot Blood* succeeded in its original mission: to scare the pants off its readers. Following its success, as the prospect of doing a second volume became a reality, we agreed with the editor at Pocket Books that the next collection's content should be 100 percent new, to emphasize its value to horror fans who tended to shun reprint material (though we still feel the reprinted fiction in *Hot Blood* is some of the book's best material). The results are a second volume whose content is easily as good as the first, a book that proves there are dozens of great stories to be told when mating

sex with horror.

Most of the original stories in *Hot Blood* were nominated for various short fiction awards in the horror and science fiction fields. We expect no less from *Hotter Blood*, to be published in January 1991 by Pocket Books.

Hotter Blood features a hot-and-heavy blend of male/female authors, supernatural/psychological horror, established masters of the field and a sampling of newcomers you'll be hearing more from in the years to come. Scan the list of authors included in this volume and you'll see what we mean. *Hotter Blood* even boasts the first published short prose of two phenomenally successful comic book writers.

We hope you'll try it.

You won't be disappointed.

Cemetery Dance hails *Hotter Blood* as "an outstanding collection . . . a must-read for any horror fan!" *Gauntlet* magazine says, "*Hotter Blood's* lineup is a virtual Who's Who of modern horror, with a mixture of talented newcomers bound to hit it big in the near future." And according to *Iniquities*, *Hotter Blood* is "A provocative journey into the gut wrenching excursions of the horrors that we all face."

The excerpts below provide a spine-tingling preview of what you'll discover within the pages of this exciting new volume.

Again, we urge you to share the experience with us. Chances are good that someday you'll read a third in the series. After all, having done *Hot Blood* and *Hotter Blood*, it seems inevitable that the series just has to conclude with the *Hottest Blood* of all!

Jelf Gelb

Michael Garrett

January 1991

RICHARD LAYMON -- "The Tub"

"Christ," she gasped. "You hurt me."

He didn't apologize.

He didn't say a thing.

She realized that he couldn't. His head, next to her own, was facedown in the water. The level was lowering, but slowly. The heat enclosed Joyce's head like a warm hood. Only the front of her face was in the air.

So Ken's face had to be submerged.

He's going to drown!

"Ken!"

He didn't stir.

He wasn't making bubbles. He wasn't breathing.

His chest was mashed tight against Joyce's chest.

She felt her raging heartbeat. Whether *his* was beating, she couldn't tell.

Though she was pinned down by his weight, her arms were free. They'd been around him at the moment of the fall. So she made fists and pounded on his back.

"Ken! Ken, wake up!"

He's not sleeping, you idiot.

"Ken! Get your head up! Ken!"

She kept hammering her fists down against his back. They made meaty thuds. She had no idea whether pounding on him would do any good, but she'd seen it done on doctor shows. Also, in a way, it felt good. Each blow sent quick little tremors through his body. Like rapping a water melon at the grocery store. The tremors made him vibrate on top of her. They gave Joyce a tingle.

The blows even jostled his penis a little.

It was still buried in her. Still erect.

"I *know* you're faking," she said. "Now, come on. Dead guys don't have boners."

He didn't move.

"Come on, Ken. This isn't funny. I bumped my damned head. Besides, you scared me. I thought you were dead or something."

He still didn't move.

"All right. You're asking for it." She jabbed the long nail of her forefinger into his back. She felt it pop into his skin. He didn't flinch.

A sick, icy chill snaked through her bowels.

"Oh, my God," she muttered.

She nudged his head with the side of her face. It moved easily. She bumped her cheekbone against his ear. His head swung away, then flopped back and hit her as if trading blows.

"Shit!"

He's dead! The bastard's *dead!*

Joyce squirmed under his terrible weight.

This won't be easy, she thought.

R. PATRICK GATES -- "A Hard Man Is Good To Find"

Lee hesitated, then decided to plunge ahead no matter how awkward she felt. This was too important. "Yes, actually, you can answer some questions for me," she replied in her best feminine in-need-of-help voice.

"I'd be delighted," the doctor said. "Perhaps you'd care to ask them over dinner at my place, say tonight?" he added in a suave voice.

Lee ignored the invitation for the moment. "All I

need to know is -- is it unusual for a man to die with an erection?" she asked boldly, getting the reaction she expected.

"What? Are you kidding?" The doctor sounded shocked, but excited, too. There was a nervous giggle behind his words.

"No, no. You see, I'm having an argument with this friend who's always trying to put stuff over on me. I say she's pulling my leg and I want to show her up," she lied.

"Oh," the doctor said, trying to sound like he understood, or even believed her, but he was unconvincing. A hint of lechery crept into his voice when he spoke again. "I still think we could discuss it at my place. I can show you that live erections are much more fun than dead ones."

Don't bet on it buster, Lee thought with a wry smile. "That might be nice," she said flirtatiously, "but I need this information right away. I'm meeting my friend for lunch."

"All right. If we can call it a date, I'll answer your question." Lisa agreed. "Your friend is right," the doctor explained. "It is very common for the blood to collect in the groin causing the penis to become engorged and erect in death."

Lisa smiled into the receiver. "Uh, how long would something like that necessarily last?" she asked.

"Oh, I guess until an undertaker removes the blood from the body or until the thing rotted away, I guess," the doctor said, laughing awkwardly. "There's a statue in France of a fallen general, taken from a body cast of him days after he died, and his erection is very clear in the bronze. Now what time shall I pick you up for dinner?"

"Make it seven. And Dr. Ruttlles, do me a favor? Please don't tell anyone that we have a date. I know from Darlene what gossips those nurses and doctors are there." The doctor readily agreed, and she gave him her address.

CHET WILLIAMSON -- "Change of Life"

BOY

Leonard trundled down the hall on all fours, feeling rationality slipping away from him, knowing only that he had to find the boy, and not knowing what he would do when he did. He sat up on his hind legs in front of the room from which the man had come, and scratched on the door with the long nails of his forepaws.

"Tommy, see who that is!" came a voice from inside. Leonard scratched some more, heard a thumping, and realized that the boy was jumping up and down, trying to see through the peephole.

"Tommy?"

"Huh?"

"Who is it?"

"I dunno . . ." Tommy answered, obviously afraid

to open the door. "Just some man . . ."

Leonard felt something wiggle inside him, felt the clumsy bear thoughts begin to fade and be replaced by his own clear impressions.

Just some man . . .

God bless you, you little fucker, Leonard thought, shambling back to the door of his room, feeling himself get thinner and thinner, welcoming the chill, poorly heated hall air on his rapidly balding skin, and best of all, seeing his nose disappear.

And as he dashed through the door, a bear no longer, but a stark-naked man, he thought once more, God bless you, you weird little bastard, and I'm never gonna get near you again . . ."

RAY GARTON -- "Picture of Health"

At first she turned the heavy black pages looking only closely enough to see that the book was filled with small newspaper clippings, some of which were accompanied by grainy black-and-white photographs. It took a few moments for her to realize they were all obituaries. Frowning, she stopped and read one. A twenty-seven-year-old woman named Phyllis Browning, who died of complications due to AIDS. The next was accompanied by a photo of a handsome man named Walter McClaren; he also died of complications due to AIDS. She began scanning the obituaries of men and women more rapidly, squinting in the candlelight . . .

" . . . died of pneumonia due to AIDS . . ."

" . . . of complications brought on my the AIDS virus . . ."

" . . . of bone cancer due to AIDS . . ."

" . . . due to AIDS . . ."

" . . . AIDS . . . AIDS . . . AIDS . . ."

Caryl was finding it more and more difficult to breathe as she read and finally stopped breathing for a long, long moment when she saw one particular picture.

A beautiful, smiling black woman. Twenty-nine years old. It was the woman she'd seen in Westwood. But this was her obituary.

She swept through the book until she found another familiar face.

The man with the oxygen tank in the sidewalk cafe. And the sore-covered woman outside Tori Steele.

Caryl tried to breathe out but couldn't at first as she raised her head slowly, her eyes moving up the dilapidated body on the canvas. The same hideous sores . . . the same sickening lumps under the jaw . . . and the eyes . . . those eyes . . .

LISA W. CANTRELL -- "Cruising"

Blond hair dripped over the back of the seat,

cascading like ripples on a pond. Brad loomed over her, hands bracing the seat on either side of her head. He looked like he was eating her face.

Bastard! Bastard! Bastard!

They sprang apart, Brad jerking his head up with a startled look on his face, Karen swinging around. Danny watched her bring her hand up to shade her eyes from the glare of his lights.

Ekshilaration took hold. He popped the Jaguar into reverse, lurching backward about twenty feet, then started inching forward again in little jumps and spurts. One foot on the gas, one on the brake, he revved the engine between each burst.

Brad whirled around, wrenched open his door and jumped out striding toward the Jag. Fury radiated from his hands, clenched at his sides. Mr. Macho Man, ready for a confrontation.

Danny smiled and slammed into reverse again, spinning in an arc away from the Camaro. Wheels churned up the ground, throwing clumps of grass and gravel in their wake.

Brad stopped, was standing uncertainly at the rear of the Camaro. He'd recognized the Jag. Karen had her window rolled down, leaning out to see.

For a moment, Danny ignored the pair of them, listening to the feral purr of the Jaguar's engine, hearing it thrum through his veins, flame like a geyser of hard-rock sound. A wave of dizziness took him, lust -- for the Jag, for the night -- blurring all other emotions.

Then he looked at Karen. She was sitting there, face freeze-framed in the window, hair ruffling in the breeze.

He wanted her -- *God!* How he wanted her.

Gradually, he began easing the car forward again, nosing it toward Brad, keeping him square in his sights.

Brad began backing away. He didn't look so macho now, he looked scared.

Danny liked that look. Liked it a lot.

REX MILLER -- "Surprise"

Warren Childress had everything. It came to him magnified, amplified, multiplied times a thousand -- the awareness that he was the king of the hill -- as he reached the 8th hole of the front nine at Brook Hollow. His kind of hole, he thought with a smile.

You reached it by traversing a quaint wooden bridge that spanned a picturesque winding stream dividing the 7th green and the 8th tee. Some viewed it as a water hazard. Not Warren. To him it was just another chance to grandstand. He never overshot the 7th and never flubbed one into the drink off the 8th. Invariably there were one or two foursomes stacked up waiting to go off the 9th and into the clubhouse. It gave people on the

8th hole a little captive gallery, so that a perfectly hit ball could be watched and admired by the golfers waiting to tee off up on the 8th green.

"You're up, Warren," one of the guys said to him.

"Right," he said, getting a tee and sliding a gleaming Ultra-flite Gold out of his expensive leather bag.

He had a pro swing. Fluid. Grooved. Beautifully smooth. The contact was solid and full, that great feeling when you know it's dead bang on. He didn't even lift his head for a second, just stayed down over the tee, arms in the top of his backswing arc, wrists cocked, not having to look, knowing he was there even before he heard the oohs and aahs of the other envious players.

Unconsciously, as he took a tee out of his left trouser pocket, he'd let his fingers slide across his groin, feeling for the small growth he'd noticed that morning.

KARL EDWARD WAGNER -- "The Kind Men Like"

Kristi Lane suddenly stopped struggling. She stared in wonder at the woman crouched on top of her.

"Who are you?"

"I'm your daughter," Chelsea panted. "Now tell me what I am!"

Kristi Lane laughed and pushed Chelsea off her. "Like mother, like daughter. You're a succubus."

A succubus!"

"Dictionary time? A demon in female form -- a temptress who haunts men's dreams, who draws youth and strength from their lust. Surely by now you've begun to wonder about yourself."

"I'd found out from agency records that you were my mother. I thought that if I could find you, you might explain things -- like why I'm unnaturally strong, and why I look like I'm still twenty, and why I keep having dreams about being you."

"I think it's time we had our mother-daughter chat," Kristi said, helping her to her feet. "Let's go home."

NANCY A. COLLINS -- "Demonlover"

"Feral... remember me? You gave me your key...?" She took a hesitant step forward.

"Sssina." It sounded strangely sibilant. "Yes, I remember. I've been waiting for you." He pulled himself upright, exposing bare white flesh down to his waist. He appeared to be supporting his entire body on his forearms, the muscles rigid as marble. Sina was relieved to find the insides of his arms free of needle tracks.

His chest was hairless. In fact, except for the champagne-colored hair on his head and his slightly

darker eyebrows, Feral's entire body was as smooth as glass. At least, those parts of his body she could see. She took another step toward him. Funny, he didn't seem to have either nipples or navel.

Feral smiled and moved to meet her, gliding from behind the bed. His naked flesh glowed in the near-dark, as translucent as opal. His genitals were overlarge, and as she watched, his penis grew to full erection. It was almost enough to take her mind off the fact that from the crotch down Feral was a snake.

OTHER HOTTER BLOOD CONTRIBUTORS: John L. Byrne, Kurt Busick, Stephen Gresham, Gary Brandner, Mick Garriss, Stephen Gallagher, Paul Dale Anderson, J.N. Williamson, James Kisner, Kiel Stuart, Graham Masterton, Elsa Rutherford, Don D'Amassa, Michael Newton, John Shirley, Lucy Taylor, and Grant Morrison.





JOE CITRO INTERVIEWS JOSEPH W. ZARZYNSKI

PEOPLE IN THE SHADOWS

Joseph W. Zarzynski might well be the hero of a horror novel. He's not. He's a real guy. And for the last seventeen years he's been out in the wilds looking for dragons. Joe Zarzynski (Zarr) is an honest-to-god monster hunter.

When I began researching my novel *Dark Twilight* (about a man who wants to prove there is a Loch Ness-type monster in Lake Champlain), I quickly discovered my protagonist had a real-life counterpart. Somewhat timidly, not knowing what to expect, I approached Zarr for help with background material for my book. In doing so, I discovered one

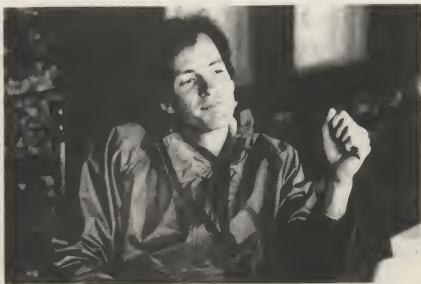
of the most fascinating, multi-leveled people I've ever met.

A teacher by profession, the forty-year-old Zarzynski stands six-foot-five and is an accomplished runner, swimmer, and diver, all useful skills for finding, or perhaps escaping, water monsters. He has participated in several monster hunting expeditions at Scotland's Loch Ness. Then a few years ago he discovered he had another monster much closer to home. Today, with the help of his wife Pat Meaney, Zarr runs The Lake Champlain Phenomena Investigation, which has catalogued over 300 monster sightings dating

back to 1609. He publishes *Champ Channels*, a newsletter devoted to monster lore, and has authored two books, *Champ: Beyond the Legend* and *Monster Wrecks of Loch Ness and Lake Champlain*.

Zarr is considered the foremost authority on the elusive creature that may -- or may not -- live in the deep, cold waters of Lake Champlain. His research has won endorsements from such varied sources as Dr. George Zug of the Smithsonian Institution and bestselling novelist Clive Cussler.

To get the scoop on Lake Champlain's incredible critter, I interviewed Zarr at his home near Saratoga Springs, New York.



CITRO: Outside of your monster hunting, you lead a fairly "normal" -- in some ways exceptional -- life. For seventeen years you've been a respected member of the faculty at Saratoga Springs Junior High School. As an underwater archaeologist you have personally discovered wrecks from the French and Indian War that are of national historical importance. Tell me how you got interested in tracking the Lake Champlain Monster? What got you started?

ZARZYNSKI: It goes back to my

interest in the Loch Ness monster, something that has interested me since I was a child. Things sort of peaked in 1974. I was from around Binghamton, New York and had just arrived as a new teacher in Saratoga Springs. Not knowing many people, I had some extra time, so I went to the Skidmore College library and found a book on Loch Ness. It was called *Monster Hunt*, by the most famous of all lake monster hunters, Tim Dinsdale. A friend of mine, a life-long resident of this area, saw me with the book and said, "You know, if you're interested in the Loch Ness monster, what about the Lake Champlain monster?" I thought he was pulling my leg, but he really wasn't. So I started to investigate and found out that indeed there was an abundance of reported sightings up at Lake Champlain, almost right in my own backyard. You might say that my interest in Loch Ness was a springboard to jump into Lake Champlain.

CITRO: Did you find that the two monsters and the two lakes had anything in common?

ZARZYNSKI: It's uncanny. I think that's probably the best word to describe the similarities between the two bodies of water and the reported sightings. Both lakes are fresh water, they're both deep, they both have an abundance of fish life. Both were formed roughly eight to ten thousand years ago as fresh water. Prior to that they had marine influence because they were extensions of the North Atlantic. They're both in that realm of forty to sixty degrees north and south latitude, within that band Dr. Roy Mackal likes to call "the monster band."

In terms of sightings, I think we're talking about creatures that are probably the same species. Large, dark in color, head that looks like that of a horse, a snake, or a dog. And possibly two or four flippers. Although I'd have to say that when you look at the sightings from Loch Ness compared to Lake Champlain, some

of the Loch Ness witnesses are talking about a real big water bull, something sixty to seventy feet in length! We just don't see that in Lake Champlain. Apparently the Champ creatures are a little smaller.

CITRO: Tell me a little about the history of the Champ sightings. How many have there been?

ZARZYNSKI: There have been over 300 sightings since 1609. My book *Champ: Beyond the Legend* does a pretty good job documenting them. What makes the saga of Champ so intriguing is its long history. Some people believe that the first recorded sighting was made in 1609 by the famous French explorer Samuel de Champlain. One account says he saw a large fish, probably not a Champ, but a lake sturgeon or gar pike. Another historian, Majorie Porter, wrote that Champlain actually saw a monster 20 feet long, with a head like a horse, and as wide as a barrel. So, Champlain's first sighting is controversial. The next sighting was in 1819 with a few dozen more recorded in the 19th century. So you can see we're dealing with a phenomenon that was not just created in the last half of this century, while Nessie (the Loch Ness Monster) was becoming so popular.

CITRO: It is my understanding that the hidden animals in Lake Champlain and Loch Ness are not unique. That there are several other lakes in North America said to contain monsters?

ZARZYNSKI: There are so many lakes with purported monsters. Some of the more famous in North America are Lake Memphremagog in Quebec and Vermont, Lake Tahoe in Nevada, Okanagan Lake in British Columbia, and more recently, the Nessie-like animals spotted in Lake Erie. So Champ and Nessie apparently have many cousins.

CITRO: Right. But all undocu-

mented. Doesn't that strike you as strange? Lots of monsters, lots of lakes, but no real documentation . . . ?

ZARZYNSKI: Well, I'm not so sure they are seeing a monster in Lake Erie and some of the others. What differentiates a Lake Champlain from a Lake Erie from a Lake Tahoe is that Champlain has a long tradition of reported sightings -- over three hundred -- that date back not just the last few years, but decades. It's a long track record that sets a Lake Champlain apart from some of the rest.

CITRO: Let's talk about the Lake Erie sightings for a minute. You say there was no real tradition of monster sightings. Then, all of a sudden, people were seeing monsters all over the place. How do you explain that? Do these beasts just spontaneously generate or what?

ZARZYNSKI: Lake Erie is a big lake and it's just one single entity in a long chain of waterways. There's a pretty good likelihood that what these people were seeing was either a sturgeon or we're dealing with a species that is somewhat exotic that strayed from its normal environment. Something that comes from, maybe down in the Caribbean that made a sojourn into the St. Lawrence and so forth. You know there are whales that make it pretty far up the St. Lawrence . . .

CITRO: Back to Lake Champlain. Please tell me what, in your opinion, is the single most dramatic, or perhaps convincing Champ sighting?

ZARZYNSKI: That's a tough question, Joe. I'd say the most dramatic sighting was by Sandra and Tony Mansi in 1977. During that sighting they actually photographed Champ . . . or what they claimed was Champ. In many respects it reminds me of the 1934 photo taken at Loch Ness, by Dr. Wilson. Both depict a dark creature with head and neck projected out of the water.

CITRO: I've heard a lot of critical, or at least skeptical stuff about the Mansi photo. What about that?

ZARZYNSKI: Oh sure. It's got its positive and its negative sides. It's the classic photograph of Champ, if for no other reason than the amount of publicity it's had. But when you start to investigate you see that there are some shortcomings. It was taken in early July of 1977. It wasn't until two years later that the family came out of the closet and started to talk about the photograph. At that time, in 1979, we tried to take the family up to the location, the exact location, and we couldn't find it! They were a little bit disoriented. But to their credit, things had changed. What was once a field was now condos and houses. Dirt roads had been paved. In two to three years there'd been a general face lift. The other problem, which is major, is that they couldn't produce the negative. The family apparently tossed the negative out, or misplaced it. So we're dealing with a purported lake monster photograph, a place we couldn't find, and no negative. The photo did go through a series of tests out at the University of Arizona and we still believe it's the classic photo.

Yet for all the finger-pointing that has gone on, the Mansi's were probably the most down-to-earth, normal people that you could find. One thing that helped convince me was that after they had the photograph developed they pinned it up on their kitchen wall. What is more normal than that? They pinned it on their kitchen wall and there it sat.

CITRO: So who were some of the other "credible" witnesses?

ZARZYNSKI: Several actually stand out, including the Mansi's. There was one man, I forget his name now. He lived on the lake in a houseboat. He was probably the most nautical-minded witness. When he talked about his sighting it was so many

points to the port side. He referenced the compass, and things like this.

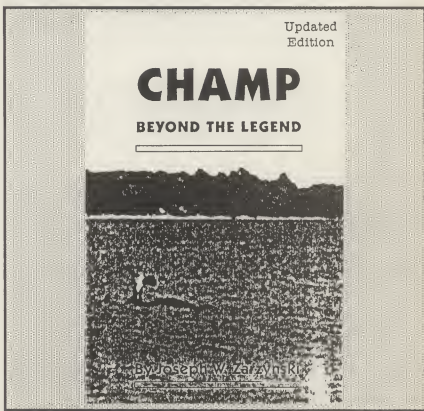
Then there was another guy, I think his name was Morse, who had a land sighting. That's really rare.

CITRO: You are considered the expert on the Lake Champlain Creature. More than anyone else, you've weighed all the pros and cons. So level with me, in your heart of hearts, do you really believe there is something unknown in Lake Champlain?

ment of planning expeditions, the thrill when field work techniques work, and the people . . . I've met such fascinating people in the search.

And the thing that really excites me and regenerates me -- the battery charge -- is that new sighting. I go and I talk to the people. I look in their eyes and I see this blast of energy that sort of comes out of their eyes and their mouths and it hits me and it just keeps me going.

CITRO: Yet you've never seen it



ZARZYNSKI: Yes I do, Joe. However -- and this is the first time I've ever admitted this in an interview -- I'm beginning to wonder if we'll ever conclusively prove Champ's existence. I used to be 99.9 percent sure Champ existed. Now I'm down to 95 percent. Why? I suppose it's the seventeen years of effort, with little to show but 300 Champ sightings, a few photos, and some rather poor video. Nonetheless, the challenge is still there and I suppose that's what drives me. The excite-

yourself--

ZARZYNSKI: But I have! In August 1988, my wife, several people, and myself saw what could have been Champ, or . . .

CITRO: Tell me about it.

ZARZYNSKI: It was almost a surrealistic experience simply because I was trying to do more than one thing at a time. We had a sixty-three-foot air-sea rescue boat that was on loan

to us for helping train a bunch of sea scouts. Part of our work involved doing side-scan sonar near Westport, New York. There was Marty Klein of Klein Associates whose company developed the sonar. He'd done a lot of work in the 70's at Loch Ness. And my wife, Pat. They were sitting down enjoying a very hot day at the stern of this huge, military-like vessel.

The rest of the group was focused on the sonar unit. Pat and Marty were the first to observe this dark thing in the water. We'd just made a turn toward the New York side. They said, "We see something out there." When I looked all I initially saw was the dark wave that had been created by our turn. But what they were talking about was something much further beyond us. When they got me away from the equipment I looked through the binoculars and could clearly see something very animate. It was dark in color, and it was coming out of the water. The expression that my wife and I used at the time really stuck -- it was *thrashing* on the surface. It would just thrash. It was heading toward the Vermont side at a range of maybe half-a-mile to a mile. I didn't see a head, but it was definitely animate. It could have been a fish porpoising or something like that. But there was some size to it. I could see a three to four foot length of something, and that was only part of it. It was not just a disturbance of the water; it was definitely animate. The interesting phenomenon was that we had three trained observers and still in our minds we were saying, "Is it this? Or is it this? Or this?" I took quite a few minutes to say there was something definitely out there.

CITRO: When I first submitted *Dark Twilight*, one editor turned it down because she didn't buy the whole idea of the hero's quest. She thought because he was looking for a monster that he must be a crackpot and therefore was not a believable protagonist. But in real life you look for lake monsters. In spite of your earnest

effort and all the evidence, I can't help but guess that a lot of people must think you're a crackpot, right?

ZARZYNSKI: Oh yeah, sure. It doesn't bother me because I firmly believe that if those same people were objective enough to sit down and look at the piecemeal evidence and assemble it as a cryptozoological jigsaw puzzle they would come away at least saying there must be something there. People *are* seeing something, but what are they seeing? I think the lofty goal of wanting to know the truth may even superimpose itself over finding Champ. I just want to know what's there.

CITRO: As does the hero of my book. But with him, it's more than wanting to know what's there, he also wants something to be there. You know what I mean?

ZARZYNSKI: Sure I do. We really lost something when Tim Dinsdale died. If you read his writing you'll see he really captures the essence of what monster hunting was all about. The last time I saw him was when we were going to meet for a late breakfast at Loch Ness. I couldn't wait for breakfast. I got up at some ungodly hour and went out to this "lay-by," which is on a road overlooking the Loch, not far from the hotel. When I got there, Tim Dinsdale was already there! It was great. We were both on the same wavelength.

He puts monster hunting in a very noble light. He says, "The truth is a cloth of gold." You're not just looking for a monster, you're trying to find something much more important -- the truth.

CITRO: Some scientist -- it might have been Dinsdale -- defined "extinct" as "not yet rediscovered." I think you and I agree the most scientifically likely explanation of Champ is that he's some kind of survivor -- a plesiosaur, perhaps. At the same time I know there are other more "arcane" explanations of his existence.

What are some of the more fanciful explanations?

ZARZYNSKI: There are plenty. Champ's an illusion from drink or drugs. Or that Champ is a by-product, or extension of UFOs or something even more bizarre. Still, I tend to believe Champ is flesh and blood and has nothing to do with UFO excursion.

CITRO: Why?

ZARZYNSKI: Well, you can't photograph a ghostly apparition. Some of the Fortean investigators are quick to point out to me that maybe we're not dealing with something that's flesh and blood. Maybe we're dealing with something that comes from another dimension or something that has an ability to become materialistic and then to dematerialize. I guess you could say John Keel pioneered that approach to looking at strange phenomena. But I think we're really dealing with an animal.

CITRO: If they are real animals, there would have to be a breeding pool large enough to account for sightings dating back to before Europeans settled in this area. If that were so, how many Champ animals would be required?

ZARZYNSKI: I believe we're dealing with a community of 12 to 25 individuals. I think the lake would support a colony of that many.

CITRO: So if there are that many, how come Champ animals aren't spotted more frequently? And how come a dead body has never showed up?

ZARZYNSKI: Well, we must realize Champ's domain is subsurface. So, to find it we must think subsurface. We'll find a body if we look long and hard enough in the deep waters, 150 feet and deeper. That's where they live and die.

CITRO: Okay, fine, but don't you think it's odd that no body has ever been found? Out of all these reported lake monsters in Lake Champlain and Loch Ness and elsewhere, and after all these years of sightings, there's still not even a carcass.

ZARZYNSKI: I think it's very odd. That's why in the last few years we've tried to put a little high-tech into it to find a carcass.

Over the last several years my LCPI (Lake Champlain Phenomena Investigation) has used a Klein Side-Scan Sonar and a MiniRover Mark II ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) to look for a Champ carcass on videotape.

the Pacific Northwest. And I think the reports of a large lizard-like creature in the Congo, called the *Mokele-Mbembe*, have substance. Finally, I don't believe we've scraped the bottom of the zoological barrel related to the seas. I'm sure deep-water explorers will turn up new zoological oddities to tease us.

CITRO: What's your feeling about the paranormal?

ZARZYNSKI: I'd be naive to state, "that's all there is." By that I mean there has to be more to our planet than what we've uncovered to date. The explorers of the future will be probing dense jungles, murky wa-

CITRO: I'd like to conclude with the same question a character in *Dark Twilight* asks the protagonist. If you do find Champ then he'll be just another page in a zoology text along with mountain gorillas and leather-backed turtles. So if you find him, what then? Where does that leave you?

ZARZYNSKI: For me, there always will be great mysteries out there. Lake Champlain is simply one of the great mysteries, one of the Mount Everests. There will be another tall peak or another low valley. But I have a feeling that this one, Champ, will be around for a while . . .

I'm just hoping that myself and others are doing a proper job inspiring younger people to come along and pick up the search. This is a key thing for the cryptozoological community: to insure that this knowledge, training, and experience is passed along to other people. When the baton is passed to a new generation, I hope they'll have the knowledge and interest to continue.

Joseph W. Zarzynski's books:

Champ: Beyond the Legend
(\$12.95 + 1.75 p/h)
Monster Wrecks of Loch Ness and Lake Champlain (\$8.95 + 1.25 p/h)

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(R to L) Zarzynski, Marty Klein and Garry Kozak, during a recent monster hunting expedition at Lake Champlain.

CITRO: And still you haven't been able to prove Champ is out there. Yet obviously you *believe* he is. Are there other "monsters" -- not water monsters -- that you're inclined to believe in?

ZARZYNSKI: Sure. I think a good case can be presented for Bigfoot in

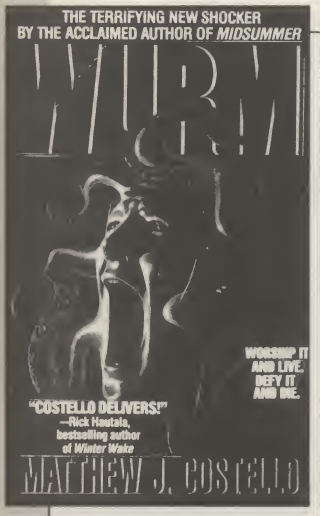
ters, maybe new dimensions. Joe, your fictional writing may be closer to the truth than many of us care to admit. As I tell my students, the great indicator is time. Given time, curious explorers, even amateurs, will answer many questions, and open up new topics of the strange to boot! I can't wait!





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TITLE: WURM
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PRICE: \$4.50/\$5.75 Can.
NUMBER: 488-7

PAGES: 352
SPINE SIZE: 57/64"
CARTON QUANTITY: 50
CATEGORY: Horror, 04

RIGHTS: US, CAN, OM ex BC
HOME OF AUTHOR: New York
BACKGROUND: A Diamond Original

BILL PRONZINI is the author of over two dozen novels and countless short stories. One of the original pioneers of dark mystery, his "Nameless" series is among the mystery field's most respected. Look for Pronzini's "The Pattern" in the Spring edition of *Cemetery Dance*.

March said, "We're going to die out here, Flake."

"Don't talk like that."

"I don't want to die this way."

"You're not going to die."

"I don't want to die of thirst, Flake!"

"There are worse ways."

"No, no, there's no worse way."

"Quit thinking about it."

"How much water is left?"

"A couple of swallows apiece, that's all."

"Let me have my share. My throat's on fire!"

Flake stopped slogging forward and squinted at March for a few seconds. He took the last of the canteens from his shoulder, unscrewed the cap, and drank two mouthfuls to make sure he got them. Then he handed the canteen to March.

March took it with nerveless fingers. He sank to his knees in the reddish desert sand, his throat working spasmodically as he drank. When he had licked away the last drop he cradled the canteen to his chest and knelt there rocking with it.

Flake watched him dispassionately. "Come on, get up."

"What's the use? There's no more water. We're going to die of thirst."

"I told you to shut up about that."

March looked up at him with eyes like a wounded animal's. "You think he made it, Flake?"

"Who, Brennan?"

"Yes, Brennan."

"What do you want to think about him for?"

"He didn't take all the gasoline for the jeep."

"He had enough."

March whimpered, "Why, Flake? Why'd he do it?"

"Why the hell you think he did it?"

"Those deposits we found are rich, the ore samples proved that -- sure. But there's more than enough for all of us."

"Brennan's got the fever. He wants it all."

"But he was our friend, our partner!"

"Forget about him," Flake said. "We'll worry about Brennan when we get out of this desert."

March began to laugh. "That's a good one, by God. That's rich."

"What's the matter with you?"

"When we get out of this desert, you said. When. Oh, that's a funny one--"

Flake slapped him. March grew silent, his dusty fingers moving like reddish spiders on the surface of the canteen. "You're around my neck like a goddamn alb-tross," Flake said. "You haven't let up for three days now. I don't know why I don't leave you and go on alone."

"No, Flake, please . . ."

"Get up, then."

"I can't. I can't move."

Flake caught March by the shoulders and lifted him to his feet. March stood there swaying. Flake began shuffling forward again, pulling March along by one arm. The reddish sand burned beneath their booted feet. Stillness, heat, nothing moving, hidden eyes watching them, waiting. Time passed, but they were in a state of timelessness.

"Flake."

"What is it now?"

"Can't we rest?"

Flake shaded his eyes to look skyward. The sun was falling now, shot through with blood-colored streaks; it had the look of a maniac's eye.

"It'll be dark in a few hours," he said. "We'll rest then."

To ease the pressure of its weight against his spine, Flake adjusted the canvas knapsack of dry foodstuffs. March seemed to want to cry, watching him, but there was no moisture left in him for tears. He stumbled after Flake.

They had covered another quarter of a mile when Flake came to a sudden standstill. "There's something out there," he said.

"I don't see anything."

"There," Flake said, pointing.

"What is it?"

"I don't know. We're too far away."

They moved closer, eyes straining against swollen, peeling lids. "Flake!" March cried. "Oh Jesus, Flake, it's the jeep!"

Flake began to run, stumbling, falling once in his haste. The jeep lay on its side near a shallow dry wash choked with mesquite and smoke trees. Three of its tires had blown out, the windshield was shattered and its body dented and scored in a dozen places.

Flake staggered up to it and looked inside, looked

around it and down into the dry wash. There was no sign of Brennan, no sign of the four canteens Brennan had taken from their camp in the Red Hills.

March came lurching up. "Brennan?"

"Gone."

"On foot, like us?"

"Yeah."

"What happened? How'd he wreck the jeep?"

"Blowout, probably. He lost control and rolled it over."

"Can we fix it? Make it run?"

"No."

"Why not? Christ, Flake!"

"Radiator's busted, three tires blown, engine and steering probably bunged up too. How far you think we'd get if we could get it started?"

"Radiator," March said. "Flake, the *radiator* . . ."

"I already checked. If there was any water left after the smash-up, Brennan got it."

March made another whimpering sound. He sank to his knees, hugging himself, and began the rocking motion again.

"Get up," Flake said.

"It's no good, we're going to die of thirst--"

"You son of a bitch, get up! Brennan's out there somewhere with the canteens. Maybe we can find him."

"How? He could be anywhere . . ."

"Maybe he was bunged up in the crash, too. If he's hurt he couldn't have got far. We might still catch him."

"He's had three days on us, Flake. This must have happened the first day out."

Flake said nothing. He turned away from the jeep and followed the rim of the dry wash to the west. March remained kneeling on the ground, watching him, until Flake was almost out of sight; then he got to his feet and began to lurch spindle-legged after him.

**

It was almost dusk when Flake found the first canteen.

He had been following a trail that had become visible not far from the wrecked jeep. At that point there had been broken clumps of mesquite, other signs to indicate Brennan was hurt and crawling more than he was walking. The trail led through the arroyo where it hooked sharply to the south, then continued into the sun-baked wastes due west -- toward the town of Sandoval, the starting point of their mining expedition two months before.

The canteen lay in the shadow of a clump of rabbit brush. Flake picked it up, shook it. Empty. He glanced over his shoulder, saw March a hundred yards away shambling like a drunk, and then struck out again at a quickened pace.

Five minutes later he found the second canteen, empty, and his urgency grew and soared. He summoned reserves of strength and plunged onward in a loose trot.

He had gone less than a hundred and fifty yards when he saw the third canteen -- and then, some distance beyond it, the vulture. The bird had glided down through the grayish sky, was about to settle near something in the shade of a natural stone bridge. Flake ran faster, waving his arms, shouting hoarsely in his burning throat. The vulture slapped the air with its heavy wings and lifted off again. But it stayed nearby, circling slowly, as Flake reached the motionless figure beneath the bridge and dropped down beside it.

Brennan was still alive, but by the look of him and by the faint irregularity of his pulse, he wouldn't be alive for long. His right leg was twisted at a grotesque angle. As badly hurt as he was, he had managed to crawl the better part of a mile in three days.

The fourth canteen was gripped in Brennan's fingers. Flake pried it loose, upended it over his mouth. Empty. He cast it away and shook Brennan savagely by the shoulders, but the bastard had already gone into a coma. Flake released him, worked the straps on the knapsack on Brennan's back. Inside were the ore samples and nothing else.

Flake struggled to his feet when he heard March approaching, but he didn't turn. He kept staring down at Brennan from between the blistered slits of his eyes.

"Flake! You found Brennan!"

"Yeah, I found him."

"Is he dead?"

"Almost."

"What about water? Is there--?"

"No. Not a drop."

"Oh, God, Flake!"

"Shut up and let me think."

"That's it, we're finished, there's no hope now . . ."

"Goddamn you, quit your whining."

"We're going to end up like him," March said.

"We're going to die, Flake, die of thirst--"

Flake backhanded him viciously, knocked him to his knees. "No, we're not," he said. "Do you hear me? We're not."

"We are, we are, we are . . ."

"We're *not* going to die," Flake said.

**

They came out of the desert four days later -- burnt, shriveled, caked head to foot with red dust like human figures molded from soft stone.

Their appearance and the subsequent story of their ordeal caused considerable excitement in Sandoval, much more so than the rich ore samples in Flake's



knapsack. They received the best of care. They were celebrities as well as rich men; they had survived the plains of hell, and that set them apart, in the eyes of the people of Sandoval, from ordinary mortals.

It took more than a week before their burns and infirmities healed enough so that they could resume normal activity. In all that time March was strangely uncommunicative. At first the doctors had been afraid that he might have to be committed to an asylum; his eyes glittered in an unnatural way and he made sounds deep in his throat that were not human sounds. But then he began to get better, even if he still didn't have much to say. Flake thought that March would be his old self again in time. When you were a rich man, all your problems were solved in time.

Flake spent his first full day out of bed in renting them a fancy hacienda and organizing mining operations on their claim in the Red Hills. That night, when he returned to their temporary quarters, he found March sitting in the darkened kitchen. He told him all about the arrangements, but March didn't seem to be interested. Shrugging, Flake got down a bottle of tequila and poured himself a drink.

Behind him March said, "I've been thinking, Flake."

"Good for you. What about?"

"About Brennan."

Flake licked the back of his hand, salted it, licked

off the salt, and drank the shot of tequila. "You'd better forget about Brennan," he said.

"I can't forget about him," March said. His eyes were bright. "What do you suppose people would say if we told them the whole story? Everything that happened out there in the desert."

"Don't be a damned fool."

March smiled. "We were thirsty, weren't we? So thirsty."

"That's right. And we did what we had to do to survive."

"Yes," March said. "We did what we had to do."

He stood up slowly and lifted a folded square of linen from the table. Under it was a long, thin carving knife. March picked up the knife and held it in his hand. Sweat shone on his skin; his eyes glittered now like bits of phosphorous. He took a step toward Flake.

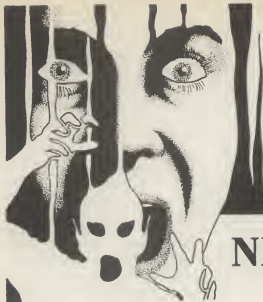
Flake felt sudden fear. He opened his mouth to tell March to put the knife down, to ask him what the hell he thought he was doing. But the words caught in his throat.

"You know what we are, Flake? You know what we -- what I -- became out there the night we cut Brennan open and drained his blood into those four big canteens?"

Flake knew, then, and he tried desperately to run -- too late. March tripped him and knocked him down and straddled him, the knife held high.

"I'm still thirsty," March said.

-- CD



MATTHEW J.
COSTELLO

NIGHTMARE ALLEY

Just last night I figured out why I'm so messed up.

And, conversely, why I write horror.

I was reading about teenage flicks from the Fabulous Fifties -- a decade that probably wasn't so cool if you actually had to live through it. Trust me.

And there was a photo from an archetypal film, *Invasion of the Saucer Men*. Now, I've seen *Invasion of the Saucer Men* just once, when it first came out. But there's an image from that teens-versus-alien quickie that I never forgot . . .

A dark, lonely country road, and some teenage hep cats -- fresh from milk shakes and making out -- are driving too fast. It's funny, but most of the teens in these movies looked thirty-something. Their forced hilarity, the hyped-up use of slang -- well, daddy-o, it was enough to make you flip your wig.

As I said, the teens barreled down the dark road too fast and someone -- *something* -- darts across the road. We catch a glimpse of a bipedal body, an enlarged head.

They stop -- and remember, I'm running on memory here -- and the teenagers nervously get out to see what they just hit.

They creep up to the front of the automobile, to the body.

Cue eerie space music and

voila! They look down on a little saucer man. A little sucker, but with one *mother* of a head and bloated fish eyes with the dispassionate look of a great white shark doing sluggish loops in the big tank in the Boston Aquarium.

And that's all I remember of the movie.

The fun, giving way to shock, and finally horror.

And here I get to the point of this little story.

Invasion of the Saucer Men appeared in 1957. And I was born in 1948, a card carrying member of the baby boomers. (And let me tell you -- while we boomers haven't done too much with all our vaulting hippy ideals, if there's another war . . . there's one thing we know how to do *real* well.)

So figure . . . 1948 to 1957, and little Matty was eight, maybe nine years old, sitting in the theater, feasting on popcorn with real butter, eating chocolate coated bon-bons, soaking up the grim black-and-white genre explosion of that golden age of cinematic horror and sf.

And I have to ask . . . why the hell didn't my parents ask my brothers what *kind* of movie they were taking me to? I mean, I saw *all* the spooky movies . . . Tom Tyron as an alien married to a luscious brunette, Michael Landon going through a

hair problem as a *Teenage Werewolf*, and Vincent Price, so oily and deadly in the still frightening *House on Haunted Hill* and *The Tinger*.

Alright, so movies back then only cost 25, maybe 35 cents. Does that mean my parents *had* to let me go with my older brothers? Just to get me out of the house? And what were they doing while we were all gone? Where was the morality, the sacred family structure to protect my widdle brain from all these warped stories?

Nowhere man. And thank god -- or whatever force put all of this together -- for it. And when I hear about Donald Wildmon and the other Defenders of Truth, Justice, and Censorship getting on their high horses, or asses, it's so damn funny I laugh. It's almost a joke . . . if there wasn't actually hordes of paranoid people worried about the effect of your book, or my book, or his/her book on some dark corner of their offsprings' souls.

When we all know that the dark corners take care of themselves just fine.

There's this one other quick story I'd like to add -- as long as we're on the subject of fear.

Recently, I was on the one and only panel I've ever enjoyed. Ever. It was at the 1990 World Fantasy Convention, an affair I'd sooner forget.

The always civilized J.N. Williamson was moderator and a bunch of other talented people participated . . . Kathryn Cramer, Steve Rasnic Tem, David Morrell, and Nancy Holder. A real nice gathering, and the topic was "What's Really Scary?"

And -- for the first time -- I found I had a reason to be on a panel. Here, at last, was a topic that I knew something about.

When my turn came, the answer spilled out easily. People laughed. But they listened . . .

Life, I answered. *Life* scares me. Not ghosts or monsters or saucer men anymore. But life itself. I live in a Hitchcockian World, where the simplest, the most innocent acts, can produce terrible, terrifying results.

And then I told the audience what happened when I landed the day before in O'Hara airport.

It went like this:

After fighting my way out of the plane, I sauntered up to the rental car counter to pick up my reserved car. Everything's so nice and easy now, isn't it? We can reserve things, and there it is, waiting for us . . .

The clerk asked for my license and major credit card.

A small, necessary bit of business. I passed them to her, thinking, okay, hurry up. Don't slow down the process now. I've got important things to do, I've got to get to Schaumburg -- wherever the hell that is.

And the clerk handed me back my cards.

And said: "I'm sorry, sir, but you can't rent a car in the State of Illinois without a valid driver's license."

I'm hearing things, I thought. I took my license.

"It's expired," she said.

And -- sure enough -- the license had expired three months ago. In my home state, New York, you have to keep track of such details. (Which makes me wonder how many other non-detail people are out there, tooling around, license-less . . . ?)

The clerk turned away.

And it was all over. I was a different person, a man without a car. Someone who couldn't get where he wanted to go.

Not a good thing in America.

For a few seconds I stood there, totally dumbfounded, the light glaring in my eyes, the clatter of the terminal now distant, alienating.

I was a goddamned changed person.

For a few seconds.

Then I had an idea.

The larcenous, the criminal idea, came to the surface so quickly it took my breath away.

I decided to try *another* car rental place. But this time, I'd look for one where the attendant appeared the least attentive.

I'd try that . . .

I spied someone standing slack-jawed at the counter, waiting forlornly, for Godot or a customer. I sauntered up, adopting my best "I'm a real person and I've got real business to do" pose.

"I'd like to rent a car," I said, forcing my heart to be still. Didn't want to give away any hint of my criminal intentions.

And it was like a scene out of *Dial M for Murder*, when Ray Milland stands, facing the police, an incriminating letter just there, on the floor between them. And as they talk, the terror, the suspense, is just too much.

The attendant asked for my license and a major credit card.

No problema, as Bart would say.

I handed them over, and considered whistling a jaunty, passing-the-time tune. Instead, I just looked away.

Something was going to happen in just seconds.

I looked away.

And suddenly the computer printer began spitting out my handy-dandy rental agreement.

I was home free. I neatly snatched the papers, and the keys, off the counter, quickly initialing all the spots avoiding insurance.

Home free.

But then--

I saw the attendant on the phone, as she ripped the feeder strip off the computer forms. She was on the phone, whispering. And I think . . .

She's alerting the police. She's telling them I'm renting a car illegally. And the Illinois smokies will be out there waiting for me!

She put the phone down. And -- a bit uneasily -- I took the agreement and marched to the shuttle bus.

And though I didn't get arrested -- though I drove as slowly and safely as I could -- there was still one more twist to keep me on edge the rest of the weekend.

When I got into the car, I pulled the seat belt across. And it didn't work.

I couldn't believe it. What do I do? Go back for another car? Risk having them examine the old license . . . just a bit closer?

"Fuck it," I said. And I pulled away, out the gate. Past the sign that said, in really big, red block letters:

NOTICE: IT IS ILLEGAL
IN THE STATE OF ILLINOIS
TO
OPERATE A MOTOR
VEHICLE WITHOUT WEAR-
ING A SEATBELT.

Just an added little touch, to make sure that my nightmare didn't end too quickly.

..

And here we are and I didn't get to the story I really wanted to tell you, my ant story. Yessir, that's a good one. A real whopper. Next time, maybe. That, and why absolutely anyone can write horror -- if they're willing to accept just *one* small fact about themselves.

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THE WINDS WITHIN

RONALD KELLY

RONALD KELLY returns to the pages of *Cemetery Dance* -- after appearing in the first four issues -- with the following dark mystery novelette. His short stories and novels of Southern terror -- *Hindsight*, *Pitfall*, and the forthcoming *Something Out There* -- have earned him a loyal following. Look for other Ron Kelly tales in *Cold Blood*, *Shock Rock*, *Gauntlet*, and several other anthologies.

Idle hands are the devil's workshop, so goes the saying.

Particularly in my case.

During the day, they perform the menial tasks of the normal psyche. But at night, the cold comes. It snakes its way into my head, coating my brain with ice. My mind is trapped beneath the frigid surface; screaming, demanding relief. It is then that my hands grow uninhibited and become engines of mischief and destruction.

As the hour grows late and the temperature plunges, they take on a life of their own. They move through the frosty darkness like fleshen moths drawn to a flame. Searching for warmth.

And the winds within howl.

"Dammit!" grumbled Lieutenant Ken Lowery as the beeper on his belt went off. He washed down a mouthful of raspberry danish with strong black coffee, then reached down and snapped off the monotonous alarm of the portable pager. "I knew it was going to be a pain in the neck when the department passed these things out. Makes me feel like I'm a doctor instead of a cop."

Lowery's partner, Sergeant Ed Taylor, sat across from him in the coffee shop booth. He nibbled on a cream-filled donut, looking tanned and rested from his recent vacation in Florida. "I hope it's not anything serious," said Taylor. "I don't think I could stomach bullet holes and brains my first day back on the job. Not after I've spent the last week in Disney World, rubbing elbows with Mickey Mouse and Goofy."

Lowery stood up and stared at the man with mock pity. "Oh, the tragic and unfair woes of a homicide detective!"

"Okay, okay," chuckled Taylor. "Just make the damned call, will you?"

The police lieutenant went to the front counter and

asked to use the business phone. He talked to the police dispatcher for a moment, then returned to the booth, looking more than a little pale.

"What's up?" asked Taylor. "Did they give us a bad one?"

Lowery nodded. "You know that case I was telling you about earlier? The one I was assigned to while you were on vacation?"

"The mutilation murder?"

"One and the same. Except that it's *two* and the same now."

Taylor felt his veneer of tranquility begin to melt away. The lingering effects of the Magic Kingdom and Epcot Center faded in dreadful anticipation of blood and body bags. "Another one? Where?"

"The same apartment building," said Lowery. "1145 Courtland Street."

"Well, I'm finished," said Taylor. He crammed the last bite of donut into his mouth. "Let's go."

"Welcome back to the real world, pal," said Lowery as they climbed into their unmarked Chrysler and headed for the south side of the city.

The apartment building on 1145 Courtland Street was one of Atlanta's older buildings, built around the turn of the century. It was unremarkable in many ways. It was five stories tall, constructed of red brick and concrete, and its lower walls were marred with four-letter graffiti and adolescent depictions of exaggerated genitalia. The one thing about the structure that did stand out were the twin fire escapes of rusty wrought-iron that zig-zagged their way along the northern and southern walls from top to bottom. The outdated additions gave it the appearance of a New York tenement house, rather than anything traditionally Southern.

There were a couple of patrol cars parked out front, as well as the coroner's maroon station wagon. "Looks like the gang is all here," observed Lowery. He parked the car and the two got out. "The dispatcher said this one was on the ground floor. The first murder was on the fourth floor. The victim was an arc-welder by the name of Joe Killian. And, believe me, it was a hell of a mess."

"I'll check out the case photos when we get back to the office," Taylor said. He followed his partner up the steps and past a few curious tenants in the drab hallway. The apartment building was nothing more than a low-

rent dive; a place where people down on their luck -- but not enough to resort to the housing projects or homeless shelters -- paid by the week to keep out of the cold streets. And it was plenty cold that month. It was only mid-December, but already the temperature had dipped below freezing several times.

They located the scene of the crime in one of the rear ground floor apartments. The detectives nodded to the patrolman at the door -- who looked as if he had just puked up that morning's breakfast -- and then stepped into the cramped apartment. Tom Blakely from the forensic department was dusting for prints in the living room, which was furnished with only a threadbare couch, a La-Z-Boy recliner, and a 25-inch Magnavox.

"The ME is in the bedroom with the stiff," Blakely told them, not bothering to look up from his work.

Lowery and Taylor walked into the back room. The coroner, Stuart Walsh, was standing next to the bloodstained bed, staring down at the body of the victim, while Jennifer Burk, the department's crime photographer, was snapping the shutter with no apparent emotion on her pretty face.

"Morning, gentlemen," said Walsh with a Georgia drawl. He eyed Taylor's tanned, but uneasy face. "So, how was the weather down in Orlando, Ed?"

"Warm and sunny," the sergeant said absently. He felt the donuts and coffee boil in his stomach. "Who do we have here?"

"The landlord of this fine establishment," said the medical examiner. "Mr. Phil Jarrett. White male, fifty-seven years of age."

"Who found him?"

"According to the officer in the hallway, a tenant stopped by to pay his rent early this morning. He knocked repeatedly, but got no answer, and found the door securely locked. He then went around the side of the building, stepped onto the fire escape, and peeked in the bedroom window over yonder. That's when he discovered Mr. Jarrett in his present state."

Lowery stared at the body of the middle-aged man. "Just like the other guy?"

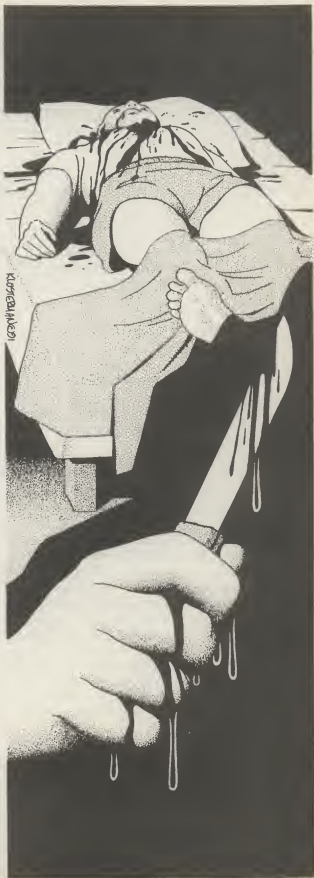
"Yep. Exactly the same. The same organs were taken before the throat was slashed from ear to ear, just like Killian."

"Organs?" asked Taylor.

The coroner bent down and, with a rubber-gloved hand, showed the detective the extent of the damage. "Pretty nasty, huh?"

"I'll say," said Taylor. He turned away for a moment. He felt nauseous at the sight of mutilation, even though he had been on Homicide detail for nearly ten years. "Why would someone do something like that?"

Walsh shrugged. "I reckon that's what we're here for." The coroner turned to Lieutenant Lowery. "Did you ever find any leads after the Killian body was found?" he asked.



"Nope," said the detective. "Haven't had much of a chance. The Killian murder was only last Friday, you know. I only interviewed the landlord here. He didn't have anything useful to say. Looks like that's still the case."

Ed Taylor regained his composure and studied the body again. It was clad only in a V-necked undershirt and a pair of Fruit of the Loom boxer shorts, both saturated with gore. He stared at the ugly wounds, then glanced at his partner. "Did you interview any of the tenants, Ken?"

"Not yet," said Lowery. "But that would be the best place to start." The detective looked over at the lady photographer, who had finished taking the crime photos. "Could you have some prints for us later today, Jenny?"

Burk lit a cigarette and blew some smoke through her nostrils. "I'll have some glossy 8x10's on your desk by noon," she promised, then glanced around the grungy bedroom with disgust. "This guy was a real scum-sucker. Look at what he put on his walls."

The detectives had been so interested in Jarrett's corpse that they had neglected to notice the obscene collage that papered the walls of the landlord's bedroom. Pictures from hundreds of hardcore magazines had been clipped and pasted to the sheetrock. A collection of big-breasted and spread-eagled women of all sizes and races graced the walls from floor to ceiling, as well as a number of young boys and girls who were far under the legal age.

"Yeah," agreed Lowery. He spotted a naked child that bore an uncomfortable resemblance to his own six-year-old daughter. "Looks like the pervert deserved what he got. Kind of makes it a shame to book this bastard's killer. We ought to pin a freaking medal on their chest instead."

"We've got to find the guilty party first," said Taylor. "And we're not going to do that standing around here chewing the fat."

"Then let's get to work." Lieutenant Lowery clapped Walsh on the shoulder. "Send us your report when you get through with the post mortem, okay, Doc?"

"Will do," said the coroner. "And good luck with the investigation."

"Thanks," said Taylor. He glanced at the mutilated body of Phil Jarrett and shook his head. "Hell of a contrast to Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs."

"Like I said before," Lowery told him, "welcome home."

"Pardon me, ma'am, but we'd like to ask you a few questions concerning your former landlord, Mr. Jarrett," Lowery said. He flipped open his wallet and displayed his shield.

The occupant of Apartment 2-B glared at them through the crack of the door for a moment, eyeing them with a mixture of suspicion and contempt. Then the door slammed, followed by the rattle of a chain being disen-

gaged. "Come on in," said the woman. "But let's hurry this up, okay? I've gotta be at work in fifteen minutes."

Lowery and Taylor stepped inside, first studying the tenant, Melba Cox, and then her apartment. The woman herself was husky and unattractive, sporting a butch haircut and a hard definition to her muscles that hinted of regular weight training. The furnishings of her apartment reflected her masculine frame of mind. There was no sign of femininity in the decor. An imitation leather couch and chairs sat around the front room, and the walls were covered with Harley-Davidson posters. The coffee table was littered with stray cigarette butts, empty beer cans, and a ton of militant feminist literature. Lowery and Taylor exchanged a knowing glance. Cox was either a devout women's libber or a dyed-in-the-wool lesbian. A combination of both, more than likely.

"Really nothing much to say about the guy, is there?" asked the woman. "He's dead, ain't he?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Taylor. "We just wanted to know if you have any idea who would kill Mr. Jarrett? Did he have any enemies?"

"Oh, he had plenty of enemies," declared Cox. "Me included. Jarrett was a real prick. Always hiking the rent, never fixing a damned thing around here, and always making lewd remarks to the women in the building. He tried to put the make on me once and I just about castrated the sonofabitch with a swift kick south of the belt buckle."

"What about the other victim? Killian?"

Melba Cox frowned. "Didn't know him very well, but he was a sexist pig, just like Jarrett was. Just like all men are."

"Have you seen or heard anything out of the ordinary lately?" Taylor asked. "Arguments between Jarrett and a tenant, maybe? Any suspicious characters hanging around the building?"

"Nope. I try to keep my nose out of other people's business, and hope that they'll do the same." She glanced at a Budweiser beer clock that hung over the sofa, then scowled at the two detectives. "I gotta go now. Unless the Atlanta PD wants to reimburse me for docked pay, that is."

"We've got to be going ourselves," said Lowery as they stepped into the hallway. He handed her one of his cards. "We would appreciate it if you would give us a call if you happen to think of anything else that might help us."

Melba Cox glared at the card for a second, then stuffed it into the hip pocket of her jeans. "Don't hold your breath," she grumbled, then headed down the stairs, dressed in a insulated jacket and heavy, steel-toed workboots, and toting a large metal lunchbox.

"Wonderful woman," said Taylor.

"Yeah," replied Lowery. "She'd make a great den mother for the Hell's Angels." His lean face turned thoughtful. "She might just be the kind of bull dyke who would hold a grudge against a guy like Jarrett too. And

maybe even do something about it."

"Won't you gentlemen come in?" asked Dwight Rollins, the tenant of Apartment 3-D. "Don't mind old Conrad there. He won't bite you."

Lowery and Taylor looked at each other, then entered the third floor apartment. The first thing that struck them about Rollins was that he was blind. The elderly, silver-haired man was dressed casually in slacks and a wool sweater, giving him the appearance of a retired college professor. But the effect was altered by the black-lensed glasses and white cane. The dog that laid on the floor was the typical seeing-eye dog; a black and tan German shepherd.

"We didn't mean to disturb you, Mr. Rollins," said Lowery, "but we wanted to ask you a few questions concerning the recent deaths of Phil Jarrett and Joe Killian."

Rollins felt his way across the room and sat in an armchair. "Terrible thing that happened to those fellows, just terrible. Not that I'm surprised. This certainly isn't one of Atlanta's most crime-free neighborhoods, you know. Some young hoodlum broke into my bedroom six months ago. The bastard slugged me with a blackjack while I was still asleep and stole my tape player and all my audio books. Now why would someone stoop so low as to steal from a blind man?"

"There are a lot of bad apples out there, sir," said Taylor. "Some would mug their own grandmother for a hit of crack. About Jarrett and Killian . . . what sort of impression did you have of them?"

"Killian was nice enough. He was a welder. I could tell that by the smell of scorched metal that hung around him all the time. I never said much to the gentleman, though. Just an occasional 'hello' in the hallway." The old man frowned sourly at the thought of his landlord. "Jarrett was a hard man to deal with sometimes. He could be downright dishonest. He tried to cheat me out of rent money several times, telling me that a ten was a five, or a twenty was a ten. I'd never let him hornsawaggle me, though. The bank where I cash my disability checks always braille mark the bills for me. Of course, I really couldn't say much about Jarrett's treachery. A blind man has a hard enough time making it on his own, without making an enemy of the one who provides a roof over his head."

"Have you seen . . ." Embarrassed, Lowery corrected himself. "Have you *heard* anything out of the ordinary lately? Strangers? Maybe an argument between Jarrett and one of the other tenants?"

"There's always some bad blood in a place like this, but nothing any worse than usual." The old man's face grew somber. "I have had the feeling that somebody's been prowling around the building, though. I've heard strange footsteps in the hallway outside. Several times

I've felt like someone was standing on the other side of my door, just staring at it, as if trying to see me through the wood." He reached down to where he knew the dog laid and scratched the animal behind the ears. "You've sensed it too, haven't you, Conrad?"

The German shepherd answered with a nervous whine and rested its head on its paws.

"Well, we won't keep you any longer, Mr. Rollins," said Taylor. He caught himself before he could hand the man one of his cards, giving Rollins the number vocally instead. "Please give us a call if you think of anything else that could help."

"I surely will," said Dwight Rollins. "Do you think the murderer lives here in the building?"

"We can't say for sure, sir. It's a possibility, though."

"Lord, what's this world coming to?" muttered Rollins. "Well, at least I've got good locks on my door. Somebody would have to be a hell of a Houdini to get past three deadbolts."

The two detectives said nothing in reply. They thought it best not to upset the old man by telling him that, strangely enough, the apartment doors of both Jarrett and Killian had been securely locked from the inside, both before and after the times of their murders.

"Who the hell is it?" growled a sleepy voice from inside Apartment 4-A.

"Atlanta police department, sir," called Lowery through the door. "We were wondering if we could talk to you for a few minutes."

"Is this real important?" asked the tenant, Mike Porter. "If you're selling tickets to the freaking policeman's ball, I'm gonna be mighty pissed off!"

"There's been another murder in the building, Mr. Porter," said Taylor. "We'd like to talk to you about it."

The click of deadbolts and the rattle of chains sounded from the other side, then the door opened. A muscular fellow with dirty blond hair and an ugly scar down one side of his face peered out at them. "Somebody else got fragged?" he asked groggily. "Who was it this time?"

"The landlord," said Lowery. "Mr. Jarrett."

"Well, I'll be damned," grunted Porter. He yawned and motioned for them to come inside. "You fellas will have to excuse me, but I work the graveyard shift. I catch my shut-eye in the daytime."

"We just need to know a few things," Taylor told him. "Like what your impression of the two victims was and if you've noticed anything peculiar around the building lately."

"Well, old Jarrett was a first-class asshole. That's about all I can tell you about him. The other fella, Killian, was an okay guy. Had a few beers and swapped a few war stories with the man. He was a die-hard Marine, just like

yours truly."

Taylor walked over to a bulletin board that was set on the wall between the living room and the kitchenette. A number of items were pinned to the cork surface; a couple of purple hearts, an infantry insignia patch, and a few black and white photos of combat soldiers. "You were in Vietnam?" he asked.

"Yes sir," Porter said proudly. He shuffled to the refrigerator and took a Miller tall-boy from a lower shelf. "The Central Highlands from 1968 to '69. Just when things were starting to get interesting over there." He plopped down on a puke green couch and popped the top on his beer can.

"What about things here in the building?" asked Lowery. "Any fights or arguments between the tenants or with the landlord? Maybe someone hanging around that you didn't recognize?"

"It hasn't been any crazier than usual. I'm not surprised that it's happening, what with all the crack dealers and gangs in this part of town." Porter grinned broadly. "They just better not screw around with old Sergeant Rock here." He stuck his hand between the cushions of the couch and withdrew a Ka-Bar combat knife. "If they do, I'll gut 'em from gullet to crotch."

The two detectives left their number and exited the apartment. As they headed up the stairs to the fifth floor, Taylor turned to his partner. "Did you notice anything strange back there in Porter's apartment?"

"Other than that wicked knife and the crazy look in the grunt's eyes?" replied Lowery. "Not really. Did you?"

Taylor nodded. "Those pictures on the bulletin board. One of them showed Porter wearing something other than his dog tags."

"And what was that?"

"A necklace . . . made out of human ears."

"Interesting," said Lowery, recalling the mutilation of the two victims. "Very interesting."

"What do ya'll want," glared the tenant of Apartment 5-C. The skinny black woman balanced a squawling baby on her hip as she stared at the two detectives standing in the hallway.

"We'd like to talk to you about the recent murders here in the building, ma'am," Lowery said. "Can we come in for a moment?"

"Yeah, I guess so," she said. "Just watch that you don't go stepping on a young'un."

Lowery and Taylor walked in and were surprised to see four other kids, ranging from eighteen months to five years old, playing on the dirty carpeting of the living room floor. Three looked to be as dark-skinned as their mother, while one was obviously a half-breed, from the lightness of its complexion and the color of its hair.

When they asked Yolanda Armstrong about the

landlord, she scowled in contempt. "That bastard got just what he deserved, if you ask me. He was white trash, that's what he was. Wasn't about to take responsibility for things that were rightly his own."

"Pardon me?" asked Taylor, trying to clarify what she was talking about.

"The one beside the TV there, that's his. I came up short on the rent a couple of summers ago and Jarrett took it out in trade. Tried to get him to wear a rubber, but he was all liquored up and horny."

Lowery's face reddened slightly in embarrassment. "Uh, no need to go into your personal life, ma'am. All we need to know is if you've noticed anything strange going on in the building lately. Strangers in the hallway, or arguments you might have happened to overhear."

"Lordy mercy!" exclaimed the woman. "If I was to pay attention to every bit of trouble that's gone on in this building, I would've gone plumb crazy by now. Half the people in this place are junkies and drunks, and the other half are losers and lunatics. You'd just as well take your pick of the litter. Anybody in this here building could've killed both of those men."

"Including yourself?" asked Taylor.

"Don't you go accusing me!" warned Yolanda Armstrong shaking a bony, black finger in his face. "True, I've been wronged more than most. But I'm too damned busy trying to put food in my babies' mouths to go getting even with every man who treated me badly. I just take my lumps and hope they don't come knocking on my door again."

After the two detectives had left, they called on the rest of the tenants who were there at that time of day, then headed back downstairs. It was nearly twelve-thirty when they climbed into their car and headed for a rib joint over on Peachtree Street. "So, what do you think?" asked Taylor. "Think we have a suspect somewhere in that bunch?"

"Maybe," said Lowery. "Or our killer might be a neighborhood boy. A pusher or a pimp that Jarrett and Killian might have wronged in the past."

"Or we could have something a little more sinister on our hands. Maybe a serial killer."

"Let's not go jumping to conclusions just yet," Lowery told his partner. "This is just a couple of murders in a sleazy apartment building in South Atlanta, not some Thomas Harris novel. We'll grab a bite to eat, then head back to the office and check out the crime photos and Walsh's autopsy report. Later this evening we'll come back here and interview the tenants we missed the first time around."

"Sounds good to me," said Taylor. "I just hope we come up with something concrete pretty soon. I have a bad feeling that this could turn into a full-scale slaughter before it's over and done with."

"Yeah," agreed Lowery. "I'm afraid you might be

right about that."

The warmth has gone and the chill of the winter twilight invades me once again, freezing the madness into my brain. My hands shudder and shake. They clench and unclench, yearning for the spurt of hot blood and the soft pliancy of moist tissue between their fingertips. The damnable winds must be stopped! They must be driven away. And only death can provide that blessed relief.

But I must be careful. The first was easy enough, and so was the second, but only because no one expected it to happen again so soon. The next time might very well be the last. But it simply must be done. There is no denying that. Even if there are suspicious eyes and alert ears on guard throughout the building, I must let my hands do the work that they are so adept at. I must allow them to hunt out the warmth necessary to unthaw my frozen sanity.

Oh, that infernal howling! The howling of those hellish winds!

Lowery and Taylor were going over the coroner's report and the 8x10's of the two victims, when a call came in from Doctor Walsh. Lowery answered and listened to the medical examiner for a moment. Then he hung up the phone and grabbed his coat from the back of the chair. "Do you still have those binoculars in your desk drawer, Ed?" he asked hurriedly.

Taylor recognized the gleam of excitement in his partner's eyes. "Sure," he said. "What's up? Did Walsh come up with something important?"

"Yep. He found some incriminating evidence on both of the bodies."

"What did he find?" pressed Taylor. He retrieved the binoculars from his desk and grabbed his own coat.

"I'll fill you in on the way," said Lowery with a grim smile. "Let's just say that I think our killer is going to strike again, sooner than we think. And I have a pretty good idea who it is."

The blanketed form was so sound asleep that it didn't hear the metallic taps of light footsteps on the fire escape. Neither did it hear the rasp of the bedroom window sliding upward, giving entrance to a dark figure with the glint of honed steel in hand.

The snoring tenant knew nothing of the intruder, until she felt the weight of the body pressing on her chest and the edge of a knife blade pressed against the column of her throat. She laid perfectly still, afraid to move, waiting for the fatal slash to come. But the action was delayed. Instead, she felt a hand creep along her flesh, the fingers clenching and unclenching, searching through the darkness. Suddenly, she recalled the rumors that had

been going around the building that day. Rumors of the organs that had been forcefully taken from Phil Jarrett and Joe Killian.

Then, suddenly, the room was full of noise and commotion. She heard footsteps coming from the direction of the open window, as well as the sound of cursing. Abruptly, the weight of her attacker was pulled off of her, along with the sharpness of the deadly blade.

Melba Cox reached over and turned on the lamp beside her bed.

The two detectives who had visited her earlier that morning were standing in the room. The one named Taylor was beside the window, holding a snubnose .38 in his hand. The other, Lowery, was pressing the attacker face first down on the hardwood boards of the bedroom floor. As Melba climbed shakily out of bed, she watched as the detective cuffed the killer's hands.

"Are you all right, ma'am?" asked Taylor, holstering his gun and walking over to her. She saw that he had a pair of binoculars hanging around his neck.

"I think so," she muttered. She pressed a hand to her throat, but found no blood there.

Then the face of the sobbing intruder twisted into view and the woman got a glimpse of who her assailant had been. "You!" she gasped. "I would've never figured you to be the one!"

The wail of sirens echoed from uptown, heading swiftly along Courtland Street. A frigid winter wind whistled through the iron railings of the fire escape and whipped through the open window. The blustery chill caused Melba Cox and the two policemen to shiver, but it made the captured murderer howl in intense agony, as if the icy breeze was cutting past flesh and bone, and flaying the tortured soul underneath.

It was two o'clock in the morning when Ken Lowery and Ed Taylor stood in the main hallway of their precinct, drinking hot coffee in silence. They dreaded the thought of entering the interrogation room and confronting the murderer and mutilator of Jarrett and Killian. The suspect had stopped the cries of torment when brought into the warmth of the police station. That was probably what had spooked the homicide detectives the most. Those awful screams blaming the winter winds on the madness that had taken the lives of two human beings.

"Well, I guess we'd better get it over with," said Lowery, crumpling his styrofoam cup and tossing it into a wastebasket.

"I reckon so," said Taylor. He thought of the suspect and shuddered. He secretly wished that he had taken two weeks of his vacation time instead of only one. Then he would have been fast asleep in an Orlando hotel room, rather than confronting a psychopath in the early hours of the morning.

They opened the door and stepped inside. The suspect was sitting at a barren table at the center of the room. Fingers that had once performed horrible mutilation by brute strength alone, now rested peacefully on the formica surface. There was an expression of calm on the suspect's face. The cold December winds had been sealed away by the insulated walls of the police station, returning the killer to a sense of serenity. It was a serenity that was oddly frightening in comparison to the tormented screams that had filled the car during the brief ride back to the precinct.

"You can go now, officer," Taylor told the patrolman who had been keeping an eye on the suspect.

"Thanks," nodded the cop, looking relieved. "This one really gives me the creeps."

After the officer had left, Lieutenant Lowery and Sergeant Taylor took seats on the opposite side of the table and quietly stared at the suspect for a moment.

"What put you onto me?" the killer asked. "How did I slip up?"

"The coroner found some strange hair samples on the bodies of Jarrett and Killian," Lowery told him. "Dog hair. And you were the only one in the building who was allowed to keep an animal."

Dwight Rollins smiled and nodded. "Unknowingly

betrayed by my best friend," he said, then bent down and patted the German shepherd on the head. "I don't blame you, though, Conrad. I should have brushed off my clothes before I went out."

The dog whimpered and licked at its master's shoes. Lowery and Taylor had brought the dog along, hoping that it would calm the old man down. But only the warmth of the interrogation room had quelled the imaginary storm that raged in the blind man's mind.

"Can we ask why, Mr. Rollins?" questioned Lowery. "Why did you do such a terrible thing?"

Rollins calmly reached up and removed his dark glasses. "This is why."

"Good Lord," gasped Taylor, grimacing at the sight of the man's eyeless sockets.

"It happened when I was a child," explained Rollins. "I was running like youngsters do, not really watching where I was going. I tripped and fell face down onto a rake that was buried in the autumn leaves. The tines skewered both my eyes and blinded me for life. I used to have glass eyes, you know, during happier and more prosperous days. But hard times fell upon me and I had to pawn them to buy groceries. I had no idea what a horrible mistake that was."

"And why was that?" asked Lowery. He tried to



lower his gaze, but the gaping black pits in the man's face commanded his attention, filling him with a morbid fascination.

"I could have never foreseen the horror of the winds," he said. "They've tormented me during these first days of winter. They squeezed past my glasses and swirled through my empty eysockets, turning them into cold caves. And do you know what lurked in the damp darkness of those cold caves, gentlemen? Demons. Winter demons who encased my brain in ice and drove me toward insanity. I would have become a raving lunatic, if it hadn't been for my hands." He brought his wrinkled hands to his lips and kissed them tenderly. "They saved me. They found the means to seal away the winds . . . if only for a short time."

Taylor felt goosebumps prick the flesh of his arms. "You mean the stolen organs? The eyes of Jarrett and Killian?"

"Yes. They blocked out the winds. But they didn't last for very long. They would soon lose their warmth and feel like cold jelly in my head." A mischievous grin crossed Rollin's cadaverous face, giving him the unnerving appearance of a leering skull. "You know, I was wearing them when you gentlemen came to call."

"Wearing them?" asked Lowery with unease. "You don't mean--"

"Yes," replied Rollins. "Jarrett's eyes. I was wearing them when you came to my apartment yesterday morning." The old man put his glasses back on. "And you didn't even know it."

An awkward silence hung in the room for a moment, then Taylor spoke. "You'll be transferred to the psychiatric section of the city jail across town. A couple of officers will take you there later this morning. You'll remain in custody until your arraignment, after which you'll likely be sent to the state mental hospital. There you'll be evaluated to see if you're psychologically fit to stand trial."

"Very well," said Rollins passively. "But I do hope that the cell they put me in is well heated."

"We'll make sure that it is," promised Lieutenant Lowery. "I'm afraid that you won't be able to take your dog with you, though. It's against police policy, even given your handicap. But we'll see to it that Conrad gets sent to a good home. Maybe we can find some blind kid

who needs a trained guide dog."

"That would be nice," said Rollins. "But couldn't he just ride to the jail with me? That wouldn't hurt, would it?"

"No," allowed Lowery. "I suppose we could bend the rules just this once."

"God bless you," said the old man. He leaned down and hugged his dog lovingly.

After calling for an officer to watch the confessed murderer and leaving instructions for those who would transport Rollins to the main jail, Ken Lowery and Ed Taylor left the station hoping to get a few hours sleep that morning. As they walked through the precinct parking lot, a stiff winter breeze engulfed them, ruffling their clothing and making them squint against the blast of icy air.

Before reaching their cars, each man put himself in the shoes of Dwight Rollins. They wondered how they might have reacted if the cold winds had swirled inside their own heads, and if they might not have grown just as mad as the elderly blind man under the same circumstances.

It is cold here in the police van. The officers who are driving me to my incarceration claim that the heater is broken and tell me to quit complaining, so I do. I sit here silently, enduring the creeping pangs of winter, hoping that I can make it to the jailhouse before a fine blanket of frost infects the convolutions of my aged brain and once again drives me toward madness.

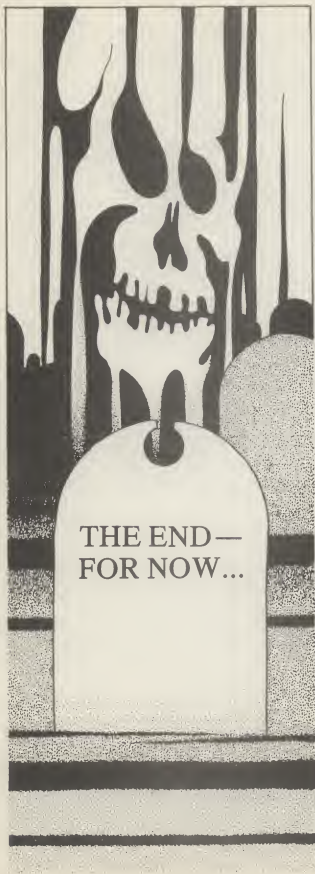
A mile. Two miles. How far away is the comfortable warmth of my designated cell? It is dark here in the back of the van. Dark and as cold as a tomb. My hands jitter, rattling the handcuffs around my wrists. I try to restrain them as they resume their wandering. Through the shadows they search for the warmth that I must have.

My friend. My dearest friend in the world . . . I am so very sorry. But it shall be over soon enough, I promise you that. You must remain faithful, my dear Conrad. You must serve me in death, just as you have in life.

You must help me block out the winds. Those horrible winds within.

-- CD





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